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KHALED: A TALE OF ARABIA



K H A L E D
A T A L E O F A R A B I A

BY

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CHAPTER I

KHALED stood in the third heaven, which is the heaven of precious stones, and of Asrael, the angel of Death. In the midst of the light shed by the fruit of the trees Asrael himself is sitting, and will sit until the day of the resurrection from the dead, writing in his book the names of those who are to be born, and blotting out the names of those who have lived, their years and must die. Each of the trees has seventy thousand branches, each branch bears seventy thousand fruits, each fruit

is composed of seventy thousand diamonds, rubies, emeralds, carbuncles, jacinths, and other precious stones. The stature and proportions of Asrael are so great that his eyes are seventy thousand days' journey apart, the one from the other.

Khaled stood motionless during ten months and thirteen days, waiting until Asrael should rest from his writing and look towards him. Then came the holy night called Al Kadr, the night of peace in which the Koran came down from heaven. Asrael paused, and raising his eyes from the scroll saw Khaled standing before him.

Asrael knew Khaled, who was one of the genii converted to the faith on hearing Mohammed read the Koran by night in the

valley Al Nakhlah. He wondered, however, when he saw him standing in his presence; for the genii are not allowed to pass even the gate of the first heaven, in which the stars hang by chains of gold, each star being inhabited by an angel who guards the entrance against the approach of devils.

Asrael looked at Khaled in displeasure, therefore, supposing that he had eluded the heavenly sentinels and concealed an evil purpose. But Khaled inclined himself respectfully.

‘There is no Allah but Allah. Moham-med is the prophet of Allah,’ he said, thus declaring himself to be of the Moslem genii, who are upright and are true believers.

‘How camest thou hither?’ asked Asrael.

‘By the will of Allah, who sent his angel with me to the gate,’ Khaled answered. ‘I am come hither that thou mayest write down my name in the book of life and death, that I may be a man on earth, and after an appointed time thou shalt blot it out again and I shall die.’

Asrael gazed at him and knew that this was the will of Allah, for the angels are thus immediately made conscious of the divine commands. He took up his pen to write, but before he had traced the first letter he paused.

‘This is the night Al Kadr,’ he said. ‘If thou wilt, tell me therefore thy story, for I am now at leisure to hear it.’

‘Thou knowest that I am of the upright genii,’ Khaled answered, ‘and I am well

disposed towards men. In the city of Riad, in Arabia, there rules a powerful king, the Sultan of the kingdom of Nejed, blessed in all things save that he has no son to inherit his vast dominions. One daughter only has been born to him in his old age, of such marvellous beauty that even the Black Eyed Virgins enclosed in the fruit of the tree Sedrat, who wait for the coming of the faithful, would seem but mortal women beside her. Her eyes are as the deep water in the wells of Zobeideh when it is night and the stars are reflected therein. Her hair is finer than silk, red with henna, and abundant as the foliage of the young cypress tree. Her face is as fair as the kernels of young almonds, and her mouth is sweeter than the

mellow date and more fragrant than 'Ood mingled with ambergris. She possesses moreover all the virtues which become women, for she is as modest as she is beautiful and as charitable as she is modest. From all parts of Arabia and Egypt, and from Syria and from Persia, and even from Samarkand, from Afghanistan, and from India princes and kings' sons continually come to ask her in marriage, for the fame of her beauty and of her virtues is as wide as the world. But her father, desiring only her happiness, leaves the choice of a husband to herself, and for a long time she refused all her suitors. For there is in the palace at Riad a certain secret chamber from which she can observe all those who come and hear their conversa-

tion and see the gifts which they bring with them.

‘At last there came as a suitor an unbeliever, a prince of an island by the shores of India, beautiful as the moon, whose speech was honey, and who surpassed all the suitors in riches and in the magnificence of the presents he brought. For he came bearing with him a hundred pounds’ weight of pure gold, and five hundred ounces of ambergris, and a great weight of musk and aloes and sandal wood, and rich garments without number, and many woven shawls of Kashmir, of which the least splendid was valued at a thousand sherifs of gold. An innumerable retinue accompanied him, and twenty elephants, and horses without number, besides camels.

‘The Sultan’s daughter beheld this beautiful prince from her secret hiding-place, and all that he had brought with him. The Sultan received him with kindness and hospitality, but assured him that unless he would renounce idolatry and embrace the true faith he could not hope to succeed in his purpose. Thereupon he was much cast down, and soon afterwards, having received magnificent gifts in his turn, he would have departed on his way, disappointed and heavy at heart. But Zehowah sent for her father and entreated him to bid the young prince remain. “For it is not impossible,” she said, “that he may yet be converted to the true faith. And have I the right to refuse to sacrifice my freedom when the sacrifice may be the means of con-

verting an idolater to the right way? And if I marry him and go with him to his kingdom, shall we not make true believers of all his subjects, so that I shall deserve to be called the mother of the faithful like Ayesha, beloved by the Prophet, upon whom be peace?" The Sultan found it hard to oppose this argument which was founded upon virtue and edified in righteousness. He therefore entreated the Indian prince to remain and to profess Islam, promising the hand of Zehowah when he should be converted.

'Then I heard the prince taking secret counsel with a certain old man who was with him, who shaved his face and wore white clothing and ate food which he prepared for himself alone. The prince told all, and

then the old man counselled him in this way. "Speak whatsoever words they require of thee," he said, "for words are but garments wherewith to make the nakedness of truth modest and agreeable. And take the woman, and by and by, when we are returned to our own land, if she consent to worship thy gods, it is good; and if not, it is yet good, for thou shalt possess her as thy wife, and her unbelief shall be of consequence only to her own soul, but thy soul shall not be retarded in its progress." And the young prince was pleased, and promised to do as his counsellor advised him.

'So I saw that he was false and that Zehowah's righteousness would be but the means to her sorrow if she were allowed to

persist. Therefore in the night, when all were asleep in the palace, I entered into the room where the prince was lying, and I took him in my arms and flew with him to the midst of the Red Desert, and there I slew him and buried him in the sand, for I saw that he was a liar and had determined to be a hypocrite.

‘But Allah immediately sent an angel to destroy me because I had put to death a man who was about to become a believer, thereby killing his soul also, since he had not yet made profession of the faith. But I stood up and defended myself, saying that I had slain a hypocrite who had planned in his heart to carry away the daughter of a Moslem. Then the angel asked the truth of the prince’s soul, which was sitting upon

the red sand that covered the body. The soul answered, weeping, and said: "These are true words, and I am fuel for hell." "Have I then deserved death?" I asked. "I have killed an unbeliever." The angel answered that I had deserved life; and he would have left me and returned to paradise, but I would not let him go, and I besought him to entreat Allah that I might be allowed to live the life of a mortal man upon earth. "For," I said, "thou sayest that I deserve life. But even if thou destroy me not now I am only one of the genii, who shall all die at the first blast of the trumpet before the resurrection of the dead. Obtain for me therefore that I may have a soul and live a few years, and if I do good I shall then

be with the faithful in paradise ; and if not, I shall be bound with red-hot chains and burn everlastingly like a sinful man." The angel promised to intercede for me and departed. So I sat down upon the mound of red sand beside the soul of the Indian prince, to wait for the angel's coming again.

'Then the soul reproached me angrily. "But for thee," it said, "I should have married Zehowah and returned to my own people, and although I purposed to be a hypocrite, yet in time Zehowah might have convinced me and I should have believed in my heart. For I now see that there is no Allah but Allah, and that Mohammed is the prophet of Allah. And I should perhaps have died full of years, a good Moslem,

and should have entered paradise. Therefore I pray Allah that this may be remembered in thy condemnation." At these words I was very angry and reviled the soul, scoffing at it. "No doubt Allah will hear thy prayer," I answered, "and will hear also at the same time thy lies. And as for Zehowah, thinkest thou that she would have loved thee, even if she had married thee? I tell thee that her soul rejoices only in the light of the faith, and that although she might have married thee, she would have done so in the hope of turning thy people from the worship of false gods and not for love of thee. For she will never love any man." When I had said this the soul groaned aloud and then remained silent.

‘In a little while the angel came back, and I saw that his face was no longer clouded with anger. “Hear the judgment of Allah,” he said. “Inasmuch as thou tookest the law upon thyself, which belonged to Allah alone, thou deservest to die. But in so far as thou hast indeed slain a hypocrite and an unbeliever thou hast earned life. Allah is just, merciful and forgiving. It is not meet that in thy lot there should be nothing but reward or nothing but punishment. Therefore thou shalt not yet receive a soul. Go hence to the third heaven and when the angel Asrael shall be at leisure he will write thy name in the book of the living. Then thou shalt return hither and go into the city of Riad bearing gifts. And Zehowah will accept

thee in marriage, though she love thee not, for Allah commands that it be so. But if in the course of time this virtuous woman be moved to love, and say to thee, 'Khaled, I love thee,' then at that moment thou shalt receive an immortal soul, and if thy deeds be good thy soul shall enter paradise with the believers, but if not, thou shalt burn. Thus saith Allah. Thus art thou rewarded, indeed, but wisely and temperately, since thou hast not obtained life directly, but only the hope of life." Then the angel departed again, leading the way.

'But the soul mocked me. "Thou that sayest of Zehowah that she will never love any man, thou art fallen into thine own trap," it cried. "For now, if she love thee

not thou must perish. Truly, Allah heard my prayer." But I was filled with thankfulness and departed after the angel, leaving the soul sitting alone upon the red sand.

'Thus have I told thee my history, O Asrael. And now I pray thee to write my name in the book of the living that I may fulfil the command of Allah and go my way to the city of Riad.'

Then Asrael again took up his pen to write in the book.

'Now thou art become a living man, though thou hast as yet no soul,' he said. 'And thou art subject to death by the sword and by sickness and by all those evils which spring up in the path of the living. And the day of thy death is already known to

Allah who knows all things. But he is merciful and will doubtless grant thee a term of years in which to make thy trial. Nevertheless be swift in thy journey and speedy in all thou doest, for though mortal man may live for ever hereafter in glory, his years on earth are but as the breath which springs up in the desert towards evening and is gone before the stars appear.'

Khaled made a salutation before Asrael and went out of the third heaven, and passed through the second which is of burnished steel, and through the first in which the stars hang by golden chains, where Adam waits for the day of the resurrection, and at the gate he found the angel who had led him, and who now

lifted him in his arms and bore him back to the Red Desert; for as he was now a mortal man he could no longer move through the air like the genii between the outer gate of heaven and the earth. Nor could he any longer see the soul of the Indian prince sitting upon the sand, though it was still there. But the angel was visible to him. So they stood together, and the angel spoke to him.

‘Thou art now a mortal man,’ he said, ‘and subject to time as to death. To thee it seems but a moment since we went up together to the gate, and yet thou wast standing ten months and thirteen days before Asrael, and of the body of the man whom thou slewest only the bones remain.’

So saying the angel blew upon the red sand and Khaled saw the white bones of the prince in the place where he had laid his body. So he was first made conscious of time.

‘Nearly a year has passed, and though Allah be very merciful to thee, yet he will assuredly not suffer thee to live beyond the time of other men. Make haste therefore and depart upon thine errand. Yet because thou art come into the world a grown man, having neither father nor mother nor inheritance, I will give thee what is most necessary for thy journey.’

Then the angel took a handful of leaves from a ghada bush close by and gave them to Khaled, and as he gave them they were changed into a rich garment, and into linen,

and into a shawl with which to make a turban, and shoes of red leather.

‘Clothe thyself with these,’ said the angel.

He broke a twig from the bush and placed it in Khaled’s hand. Immediately it became a sabre of Damascus steel, in a sheath of leather with a belt.

‘Take this sword, which is of such fine temper that it will cleave through an iron headpiece and a shirt of mail. But remember that it is not a sword made by magic. Let thy magic reside in thy arm, wield it for the faith, and put thy trust in Allah.’

Afterwards the angel took up a locust that was asleep on the sand waiting for the warmth of the morning sun. The angel held the locust up before Khaled, and then let it

fall. But as it fell it became at once a beautiful bay mare with round black eyes wide apart and an arching tail which swept down to the sand like a river of silk.

‘Take this mare,’ said the angel; ‘she is of the pure breed of Nejed and as swift as the wind, but mortal like thyself.’

‘But how shall I ride her without saddle or bridle?’ asked Khaled.

‘That is true,’ answered the angel.

He laid leaves of the ghada upon the mare’s back and they became a saddle, and placed a twig in her mouth and it turned into a bit and bridle.

Khaled thanked the angel and mounted.

‘Farewell and prosper, and put thy trust in Allah, and forget not the day of judg-

ment,' the angel said, and immediately returned to paradise.

So Khaled was left alone in the Red Desert, a living man obliged to shift for himself, liable to suffer hunger and thirst or to be slain by robbers, with no worldly possessions but his sword, his bay mare, and the clothes on his back. He knew moreover that he was more than two hundred miles from the city of Riad, and he knew that he could not accomplish this journey in less than four days. For when he was one of the genii he had often watched men toiling through desert on foot, and on camels and on horses, and had laughed with his companions at the slow progress they made. But now it was no laughing matter, for he had

forgotten to ask the angel for dates and water, or even for a few handfuls of barley meal.

He turned the mare's head westward of the Goat, in which is the polar star, for he remembered that when he had carried away the Indian prince he had flown toward the south-east, and as he began to gallop over the dark sand he laughed to himself.

'What poor things are men and their horses,' he said. 'To destroy me, this mare need only stumble and lame herself, and we shall both die of hunger and thirst in the desert.'

This reflection made him at first urge the mare to her greatest speed, for he thought that the sooner he should be out of the desert and among the villages beyond, the present danger would be passed. But presently he bethought him that the

mare would be more likely to stumble and hurt herself in the dark if she were galloping than if she were moving at a moderate pace. He therefore drew bridle and patted her neck and made her walk slowly and cautiously forward.

But this did not please him either, after a time, for he remembered that if he rode too slowly he must die of hunger before reaching the end of his journey.

‘Truly,’ he said, ‘one must learn what it is to be a man, in order to understand the uses of moderation. Gallop not lest thy horse fall and thou perish! Nor delay walking slowly by the road, lest thou die of thirst and hunger! Yet thou art not safe, for Al Walid died from treading upon an arrow, and Oda ibn Kais perished by perpetual sneezing. Allah is just and merciful!

I will let the mare go at her own pace, for the end of all things is known.'

The mare, being left to herself, began to canter and carried Khaled onward all night without changing her gait.

'Nevertheless,' thought Khaled, 'if we are not soon out of the desert we shall suffer thirst during the day as well as hunger.'

When there was enough daylight to distinguish a black thread from a white, Khaled looked before him and saw that there was nothing but red sand in hillocks and ridges, with ghada bushes here and there. But still the mare cantered on and did not seem tired. Soon the sun rose and it grew very hot, for the air was quite still and it was summer time.

Khaled looked always before him and at last

he saw a white patch in the distance and he knew that there must be water near it. For the water of the Red Desert whitens the sand. He therefore rode on cheerfully, for he was now thirsty, and the mare quickened her pace, for she also knew that she was near a drinking-place. But as they came close to the spot Khaled remembered that the preceding night had been Al Kadr, which falls between the seventh and eighth latter days of the month Ramadhan, during which the true believers neither eat nor drink so long as there is light enough to distinguish a white thread from a black one. So, when they reached the well, he let his mare drink her fill, and he took off the saddle and bridle and let her loose, after which he sat down with his head in the shade of a ghada bush to rest himself.

‘Allah is merciful,’ he said; ‘the night will come, and then I will drink.’ For he dared not ride farther, for fear of not finding water again.

Then again he was disturbed, for he had nothing to eat, and he thought that if he waited until night he would be hungry as well as thirsty. But presently he saw the mare trying to catch the locusts that flew about. She could only catch one or two, because it was now hot and they were able to fly quickly.

‘When the night comes,’ he said, ‘the locusts will lie on the ground and cling to the bushes, being stiff with the cold, and then I will eat my fill, and drink also.’

Soon afterwards he fell asleep, being weary, and when he awoke it was night again and the stars were shining overhead. Khaled rose hastily

and drank at the well and made ablutions and prayed, prostrating himself towards the Kebla. He remembered that he had slept a long time, and that he had not performed his devotions for a day and a night, so that he repeated them five times, to atone for the omission.

The mare was eating the locusts that now lay in great black patches on the sand unable to move and save themselves. Khaled threw his cloak over a great number of them and gathered them together. Then he kindled a fire of ghada by striking sparks from the blade of his sword, and when he had made a bed of coals he roasted the locusts after pulling off their legs, and ate his fill. While he was doing this he was much disturbed in mind.

‘I have only just begun to live as a man,’ he

thought. 'Did I not stand ten months and thirteen days in the third heaven, unconscious of the passing of time? Who shall tell me whether I have not slept another ten months or more under this bush, like the companions of Al Rakim?'

So, when he had done eating and had drunk again from the well, and had made the mare drink, he saddled her quickly and mounted, and cantered on through the night, guiding his course by the stars. On the following day he again found a well, but much later than before, and he suffered much from thirst as he watched his mare dip her black lips into the pool. Nevertheless he would not break his fast, for he was resolved to be a true believer in practice as well as in belief. So he fell asleep and awoke when it was night again, and ate and drank. In this way he journeyed several

days until he began to see the hill country which borders the desert towards Riad, and he understood that he had been much farther away than he had imagined. But he reflected that Allah had doubtless intended to try his constancy by imposing upon him the journey through the desert during the days of fasting. But at last, he awoke one day just at sunset, instead of sleeping until the night. He had been travelling up the first slopes where the ground, though barren, is harder than in the desert, and had lain down in a hollow by an abundant spring. He rose now and made ablutions and prayed, as usual, towards Mecca; that is to say, being where he was, he turned his face to the west as the sun was setting. When he had finished he stood some minutes watching the red light over the desert below him, and then

he was suddenly aware that the new moon was hanging just above the diminishing fire of the evening, and he knew that the fast of Ramadhan was over and that the feast of Bairam had begun. Thereat he was glad, and determined to take an unusual number of locusts for his evening meal.

But when he looked about he saw that there were no locusts in the place, though there was grass, which his mare was eating. Then he looked everywhere near the well to see whether some traveller had not perhaps dropped a few dates or a little barley by accident, but there was nothing.

‘Doubtless,’ he said, ‘Allah wishes to show me that greediness is a sin even on the day of feasting.’

He drank as much of the water as he could

in order to stay his hunger as well as assuage his thirst, and then he saddled the mare and rode up out of the hollow towards the hill country. Towards the middle of the night he came to a small village where all the people were celebrating the feast, having killed a young camel and several sheep. Seeing that he was a traveller they bade him be welcome, and he sat down among them and ate his fill of meat, praising Allah. And corn was given to his mare, so that the dumb animal also kept the feast.

‘Truly,’ said the people, ‘thy mare is a daughter of Al Borak, the heavenly steed called “the Lightning,” upon which the nocturnal journey was accomplished by the Prophet, upon whom be peace.’

They said this not because they divined that

the mare had been given to Khaled by an angel, but because they saw by her beauty that she must be swift as the wind. For she had a large head, with bony cheeks, and a full forehead and round black eyes wide apart, with smooth black skin about them, and a pointed nose, and the under lip was like that of a camel, projecting a little. And she was neither too long nor too short, having straight legs like steel, and small feet and round hoofs, neither overgrown in idleness nor overworn with much work. And her tail lay flat and long and smooth when she was standing still but arched like the plume of an ostrich when she moved. Her coat was bright bay, glossy and smooth and without any white markings. By all these signs, which belong to the purest blood, the people of the village

knew that she was of the fleetest reared in Arabia. And Khaled was glad that the people admired her, since she was the chief of his few possessions, which indeed were not many.

He did not know beforehand what he should do, nor what he should say when in the presence of the Sultan of Nejed, still less how he could venture to ask Zehowah in marriage, having no gifts to offer and not being himself a prince. Before he had become a man it would have been easy for him to find treasures in the earth such as men had never seen, for, like all the genii, he had been acquainted with the most deeply hidden mines and with all places where men had hidden wealth in old times. But this knowledge does not belong to the intelligence becoming mortals, but rather to the faculty

of seeing through solid substance which is exercised by the spirits of the air, and in his present state it was taken from him, together with all possibility of communicating with his former companions. He had nothing but his mare and his sword and the garments he wore, and though the mare was indeed a gift for a king he did not know whether he was meant to offer it to any one, seeing that it had been given him by an angel.

Nevertheless he did not lose heart, for the celestial messenger had told him that by the will of Allah he should marry Zehowah, and Allah was certainly able to give him a king's daughter in marriage without the aid of gifts, of gold, of musk, of 'Ood, of aloes or of pearls.

He rose, therefore, when he had eaten enough

and had rested himself and his mare, and after thanking the people of the village for their entertainment he rode on his way. He passed through a hill country, sometimes fertile and sometimes stony and deserted, but he found water by the way and such food as he needed ; and accomplished the remainder of the journey without hindrance.

On the morning of the second day he came to a halting-place from which he could see the city of Riad, and he was astonished at the size and magnificence of the Sultan's palace, which was visible above the walls of the fortification. Yet he was aware that he had seen all this before as in a dream not altogether forgotten when a man wakes at dawn after a long and restless night.

He gazed awhile, after he had made his ablutions, and then calling to his mare to come to him, he mounted and rode through the southern gate into the heart of the city.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Khaled reached the palace he dismounted from his mare, and leading her by the bridle entered the gateway. Here he met many persons, guards, and slaves both black and white, and porters bearing provisions, and a few women, all hurrying hither and thither; and many noticed him, but a few gazed curiously into his face, and two or three grooms followed him a little way, pointing out to each other the beauties of his mare.

‘Truly,’ they said, ‘if we did not know the mares of the stud better than the faces of our

mothers, we should swear by Allah that this beast had been stolen from the Sultan's stables by a thief in the night, for she is of the best blood in Nejed.'

These being curious they saluted Khaled and asked him whence he came and whither he was going, seeing that it is not courteous to ask a stranger any other questions.

'I come from the Red Desert,' Khaled answered, 'and I am going into the palace as you see.'

The grooms saw that there was a rebuke in the last part of his answer and hung back and presently went their way.

'Are such mares bred in the Red Desert?' they exclaimed. 'The stranger is doubtless the sheikh of some powerful tribe. But if this be

true, where are the men that came with him? And why is he dressed like a man of the city?’

So they hastened out of the gateway to find the Bedouins who, they supposed, must have accompanied Khaled on his journey.

But Khaled went forward and came to a great court in which were stone seats by the walls. Here a number of people were waiting. So he sat down upon one of the seats and his mare laid her nose upon his shoulder as though inquiring what he would do.

‘Allah knows,’ Khaled said, as though answering her. So he waited patiently.

At last a man came out into the courtyard who was richly dressed, and whom all the people saluted as he passed. But he came straight towards Khaled, who rose from his seat.

‘Whence come you, my friend?’ he inquired after they had exchanged the salutation.

‘From the Red Desert, and I desire permission to speak with the Sultan when it shall please his majesty to see me.’

‘And what do you desire of his majesty? I ask that I may inform him beforehand. So you will have a better reception.’

‘Tell the Sultan,’ said Khaled, ‘that a man is here who has neither father nor mother nor any possessions beyond a swift mare, a keen sword and a strong hand, but who is come nevertheless to ask in marriage Zehowah, the Sultan’s daughter.’

The minister smiled and gazed at Khaled in silence for a moment, but when he had looked keenly at his face, he became grave.

‘It may be,’ he thought, ‘that this is some great prince who comes thus simply as in a disguise, and it were best not to anger him.’

‘I will deliver your message,’ he answered aloud, ‘though it is a strange one. It is customary for those who come to ask for a maiden in marriage to bring gifts—and to receive others in return,’ he added.

‘I neither bring gifts nor ask any,’ said Khaled. ‘Allah is great and will provide me with what I need.’

‘I fear that he will not provide you with the Sultan’s daughter for a wife,’ said the minister as he went away, but Khaled did not hear the words, though he would have cared little if he had.

Now it chanced that Zehowah was sitting in a balcony surrounded with lattice, over the

courtyard, on that morning and she had seen Khaled enter, leading his mare by the bridle. But though she watched the stranger and his beast idly for some time she thought as little of the one as of the other, for her heart was not turned to love, and she knew nothing of horses. But her women thought differently and spoke loudly, praising the beauty of both.

‘There is indeed a warrior able to fight in the front of our armies,’ they said. ‘Truly such a man must have been Khaled ibn Walad, the Sword of the Lord, in the days of the Prophet—upon whom peace.’

By and by there was a cry that the Sultan was coming into the room, and the women rose and retired. The Sultan sat down upon the carpet by his daughter, in the balcony.

‘Do you see that stranger, holding a beautiful mare by the bridle?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I see him,’ answered Zehowah indifferently.

‘He is come to ask you in marriage.’

‘Another!’ she exclaimed with a careless laugh. ‘If it is the will of Allah I will marry him. If not, he will go away like the rest.’

‘This man is not like the rest, my daughter. He is either a madman or some powerful prince in disguise.’

‘Or both, perhaps,’ laughed Zehowah. She laughed often, for although she was not inclined to love, she was of a gentle and merry temper.

‘His message was a strange one,’ said the Sultan. ‘He says that he neither brings gifts

nor asks them, that he has neither father nor mother, nor any possessions excepting a swift mare, a keen sword and a strong hand.'

'I see the mare, the sword and the hand,' answered Zehowah. 'But the hand is like any other hand—how can I tell whether it be strong? The sword is in its sheath, and I cannot see its edge, and though the mare is pretty enough, I have seen many of your own I liked as well. The elephants of the Indian prince were more amusing, and the prince himself was more beautiful than this stranger with his black beard and his solemn face.'

'That is true,' said the Sultan with a sigh.

'Do you wish me to marry this man?'

Zehowah asked.

'My daughter, I wish you to choose of

your own free will. Nevertheless I trust that you will choose before long, that I may see my child's children before I die.'

For the Sultan was old and white-bearded, and was already somewhat bowed with advancing years and with burden of many cares and the fatigues of many wars. Yet his eye was bright and his heart fearless still, though his judgment was often weak and vacillating.

'Do you wish me to marry this man?'

Zehowah asked again. 'He will be a strange husband, for he is a strange suitor, coming without gifts and having neither father nor mother. But I will do as you command. If you leave it to me I shall never marry.'

'I did not say that I desired you to take this one especially,' protested the Sultan,

‘though for the matter of gifts I care little, since heaven has sent me wealth in abundance. But my remaining years are few, and the years of life are like stones slipping from a mountain which move slowly at first, and then faster until they outrun the lightning and leap into the dark valley below. And what is required of a husband is that he be a true believer, young and whole in every part, and of a charitable disposition.’

‘Truly,’ laughed Zehowah, ‘if he have no possessions, charity will avail him little, since he has nothing to give.’

‘There is other charity besides the giving of alms, my daughter, since it is charity even to think charitably of others, as you know. But I have not said that you should marry

this man, for you are free. And indeed I have not yet talked with him. But I have sent for him and you shall hear him speak. See—they are just now conducting him to the hall of audiences. But indeed I think he is no husband for you, after all.’

The Sultan rose and went to receive Khaled, and Zehowah went to the secret window above her father’s raised seat in the hall.

Khaled made the customary salutation with the greatest respect, and the Sultan made him sit down at his right hand as though he had been a prince, and asked him whence he had come. Then a refreshment was brought, and Khaled ate and drank a little, after which the Sultan inquired his business.

‘I come,’ said Khaled boldly, ‘to ask your

daughter Zehowah in marriage. I bring no gifts, for I have none to offer, nor have I any inheritance. My mare is my fortune, my sword is my argument and my wit is in my arm.'

'You are a strange suitor,' said the Sultan; but he kept a pleasant countenance, since Khaled was his guest. 'You are no doubt the sheikh of a tribe of the Red Desert, though I was not aware that any tribes dwelt there.'

'So far as being the sheikh of my tribe,' said Khaled with a smile, 'your majesty may call me so, for my tribe consists of myself alone, seeing that I have neither father nor mother nor any relations.'

Truly, I have never talked with such

a suitor before,' answered the Sultan. 'At least I presume that you are a son of some prince, and that you have chosen to disguise yourself as a rich traveller and to hide your history under an allegory.'

The Sultan would certainly not have allowed himself to overstep the bounds of courtesy so far, but for his astonishment at Khaled's daring manner. He was too keen, however, not to see that this man was something above the ordinary and that, whatever else he might be, he was not a common impostor. Such a fellow would have found means to rob a caravan of valuable goods, to offer as gifts, would have brought himself a train of camels and slaves and would have given himself out as a prince of some distant

country from which it would not be possible to obtain information.

‘Istaghfir Allah! I am no prince,’ Khaled answered. ‘I ask for the hand of your daughter. The will of Allah will be accomplished.’

He knew that Zehowah was watching and listening behind the lattice in her place of concealment, for the memory of such things had not been taken from him when he had lost the supernatural vision of the genii and had become an ordinary man. He was determined therefore to be truthful and to say nothing which he might afterwards be called upon to explain. For he never doubted but that Zehowah would be his wife, since the angel had told him that it should be so.

‘And what if I refuse even to consider your proposal?’ inquired the Sultan, to see what he would say.

‘If it is the will of Allah that I marry your daughter, your refusal would be useless, but if it is not his will, your refusal would be altogether unnecessary.’

The Sultan was much struck by this argument which showed a ready wit in the stranger and which he could only have opposed by asserting that his own will was superior to that of heaven itself.

‘But,’ said he, defending himself, ‘any of the previous suitors might have said the same.’

‘Undoubtedly,’ replied Khaled, unabashed. ‘But they did not say it. Your majesty will certainly now consider the matter.’

‘In the meanwhile,’ the Sultan answered, very graciously, ‘you are my guest, and you have come in time to take part in the third day of the feast, to which you are welcome in the name of Allah, the merciful.’

Thereupon the Sultan rose and Khaled was conducted to the apartments set apart for the guests. But the Sultan returned to the harem in a very thoughtful mood, and before long he found Zehowah who had returned to her seat in the balcony.

‘This is a very strange suitor,’ he said, shaking his head and looking into his daughter’s face.

‘He is at least bold and outspoken,’ she answered. ‘He makes no secret of his poverty nor of his wishes. Whatever he be, he is in

earnest and speaks truth. I would like well to know the only secret which he wishes to keep—who he really is.’

‘It may be,’ said the Sultan thoughtfully, ‘that if I threaten to cut off his head he will tell us. But on the other hand, he is a guest.’

‘He is not of those who are easily terrified, I think. Tell me, my father, do you wish me to marry him?’

‘How could you marry a man who has no family and no inheritance? Would such a marriage befit the daughter of kings?’

‘Why not?’ asked Zehowah with much calmness.

The Sultan stared at her in astonishment.

‘Has this stranger enchanted your imagination?’ he inquired by way of answer.

‘No,’ replied Zehowah scornfully. ‘I have seen the noblest, the most beautiful and the richest of the earth, ready to take me to wife, and I have not loved. Shall I love an outcast?’

‘Then how can you ask my wishes?’

‘Because there are good reasons why I should marry this man.’

‘Good reasons? In the name of Allah let me hear them, if there are any.’

‘You are old, my father,’ said Zehowah, ‘and it has not pleased heaven to send you a son, nor to leave you any living relation to sit upon the throne when your years are accomplished. You must needs think of your successor.’

‘The better reason for choosing some power-

ful prince, whose territory shall increase the kingdom he inherits from me, and whose alliance shall strengthen the empire I leave behind me.'

'Istagfir Allah! The worse reason. For such a prince would be attached to his own country, and would take me thither with him and would neglect the kingdom of Nejed, regarding it as a land of strangers whom he may oppress with taxes to increase his own splendour. And this is not unreasonable, since no king can wisely govern two kingdoms separated from each other by more than three days' journey. No man can have other than the one of two reasons for asking me in marriage. Either he has heard of me and desires to possess me, or he wishes to increase

his dominions by the inheritance which will be mine.'

'Doubtless, this is the truth,' said the Sultan. 'But so much the more does this stranger in all probability covet my kingdom, since he has nothing of his own.'

'This is what I mean. For, having no other possessions to distract his attention, he will remain always here, and will govern your kingdom for its own advantage in order that it may profit himself.'

'This is a subtle argument, my daughter, and one requiring consideration.'

'The more so because the man seems otherwise well fitted to be my husband, since he is a true believer, and young, and fearless and outspoken.'

‘But if this is all,’ objected the Sultan, ‘there are in Nejed several young men, sons of my chief courtiers, who possess the same qualifications. Choose one of them.’

‘On the contrary, to choose one of them would arouse the jealousy of all the rest, with their families and slaves and freedmen, whereby the kingdom would easily be exposed to civil war. But if I take a stranger it is more probable that all will be for him, since you are beloved, and there is no reason why one party should oppose him and another support him, since none of them know anything of him.’

‘But he will not be beloved by the people unless he is liberal, and he has nothing where-with to be generous.’

‘And where are the treasures of Riad?’

laughed Zehowah. 'Is it not easy for you to go secretly to his chamber and to give him as much gold as he needs?'

'That is also true. I see that you have set your heart upon him.'

'Not my heart, my father, but my head. For I have infinitely more head than heart, and I see that the welfare of the kingdom will be better secured with such a ruler, than it would have been under a foreign prince whose right hand would be perpetually thrust out to take in Nejed that which his left hand would throw to courtiers in his own country. Do I speak wisdom or folly?'

'It is neither all folly nor all wisdom.'

'I have seen this man, I have heard him speak,' said Zehowah. 'He is as well as

another, since I must marry sooner or later. Moreover I have another argument.'

'What is that?'

'Either he is a man strong enough to rule me, or he is not,' Zehowah answered with a laugh. 'If he can govern me, he can govern the kingdom of Nejed. But if not I will govern it for him, and rule him also.'

The Sultan looked up to heaven and slightly raised his hands from his knees.

'Allah is merciful and forgiving!' he exclaimed. 'Is this the spirit befitting a wife?'

'Is it charity to cause happiness?'

'Undoubtedly it is charity.'

'And which is greater, the happiness of many or the happiness of one?'

'The happiness of many is greater,' answered

the Sultan. 'What then?' he asked after a time, seeing that she said nothing more.

'I have spoken,' she replied. 'It is best that I should marry him.'

Then there was silence for a long time, during which the Sultan sat quite motionless in his place, watching his daughter, while she looked idly through the lattice at the people who came and went in the court below. She seemed to feel no emotion.

The Sultan did not know how to oppose Zehowah's will any more than he could answer her arguments, although his worldly wisdom was altogether at variance with her decision. For she was the beloved child of his old age and he could refuse her nothing. Moreover, in what she had said, there was much which re-

commended itself to his judgment, though by no means enough to persuade him. At last he rose from the carpet and embraced her.

‘If it is your will, let it be so,’ he said.

‘It is the will of Allah,’ answered Zehowah.

‘Let it be accomplished immediately.’

With a sigh the Sultan withdrew and sent a messenger to Khaled requesting him to come to another and more secluded chamber, where they could be alone and talk freely.

Khaled showed no surprise on hearing that his suit was accepted, but he thought it fitting to express much gratitude for the favourable decision. Then the Sultan, who did not wish to seem too readily yielding, began to explain to Khaled Zehowah’s reasons for accepting a poor stranger, presenting them as though they were his own.

‘For,’ he said, ‘whatever you may in reality be, you have chosen to present yourself to us in such a manner as would not have failed to bring about a refusal under any other circumstances. But I have considered that as it will be your destiny, if heaven grants you life, to rule my kingdom after me, you will in all likelihood rule it more wisely and carefully, for having no other cares in a distant country to distract your attention; and because you have no relations you are the less liable to the attacks of open or secret jealousy.’

The Sultan then gave him a large sum of money in gold pieces, which Khaled gladly accepted, since he had not even wherewithal to buy himself a garment for the wedding feast, still less to distribute gifts to the courtiers

and to the multitude. The Sultan also presented him with a black slave to attend to his personal wants.

Khaled then sent for merchants from the bazar, and they brought him all manner of rich stuffs, such as he needed. There came also two tailors, who sat down upon a matting in his apartment and immediately began to make him clothes, while the black slave sat beside them and watched them, lest they should steal any of the gold of the embroideries.

When it was known in the palace that the Sultan's only daughter was to be married at once, there were great rejoicings, and many camels were slaughtered and a great number of sheep, to supply food for so great a feast. A number of cooks were hired also to help those

who belonged to the palace, for although the Sultan fed daily more than three hundred persons, guests, travellers, and poor, besides all the members of the household, yet this was as nothing compared with the multitude to be provided for on the present occasion.

Then it was that Hadji Mohammed, the chief of the cooks, sat down upon the floor in the midst of the main kitchen and beat his breast and wept. For the confusion was great so that the voice of one man could not be heard for the diabolical screaming of the many, and the cooks smote the young lads who helped them, and these, running to escape from the blows, fell against the porters who came in from outside bearing sacks of sugar, and great baskets of fruit and quarters of meat and skins of water,

and bushels of meal and a hundred other things equally necessary to the cooking; and the porters, staggering under their burdens, fell between the legs of the mules loaded with firewood, that had been brought to the gate, and the dumb beasts kicked violently in all directions, while the slaves who drove them struck them with their staves, and the mules began to run among the camels, and the camels, being terrified, rose from the ground and began to plunge and skip like young foals, while more porters and more mules and more slaves came on in multitudes to the door of the kitchen. And it was very hot, for it was noon-tide, and in summer, and there were flies without number, and the dogs that had been sleeping in the shade sprang up and barked loudly and

bit whomsoever they could reach, and all the men bellowed together, so that the confusion was extreme.

‘Verily,’ cried Hadji Mohammed, ‘this is not a kitchen but Yemamah, and I am not the chief of the cooks, but the chief of sinners and fuel for hell.’ So he wept bitterly and beat his breast.

But at last matters mended, for there were many who were willing to do well, so that when the time came Hadji Mohammed was able to serve an honourable feast to all, though the number of the guests was not less than two thousand.

But Khaled, having visited the bath, arrayed himself magnificently and rode upon his bay mare to the mosque, surrounded by the courtiers and the chief officers of the state, and by a

great throng of slaves from the palace. As he rode, he scattered gold pieces among the people from the bags which he carried, and all praised his liberality and swore by Allah that Zehowah was taking a very goodly husband. And as none knew whence he came, all were equally pleased, but most of all the Bedouins from the desert, of whom there were many at that time in Riad, who had come to keep the feast Bairam, for Khaled's own words had been repeated, and they had heard that he came from the desert like themselves. And when he had finished his prayers, he rode back to the palace.

When the time for the feast came the Sultan led Khaled into the great hall and made him sit at his right hand. The Sultan himself was magnificently dressed and covered with

priceless jewels, so that he shone like the sun among all the rest. Then he presented Khaled to the assembly.

‘This,’ said he, ‘is Khaled, my beloved son-in-law, the husband of my only daughter, whom it has pleased Allah to send me, as the stay of my old age and as the successor to my kingdom. He will be terrible in war as Khaled ibn Walid, his namesake, the Sword of the Lord, and gentle and just in peace as Abu Bakr of blessed memory. He is as brave as the lion, as strong as the camel, as swift as the ostrich, as sagacious as the fox and as generous as the pelican, who feeds her young with the blood of her own breast. Love him therefore, as you have loved me, for he is extremely worthy of affection, and hate his

enemies and be faithful to him in the time of danger. By the blessing of Allah he shall rear up children to me-in my old age, to be with you when he is gone.'

Thereupon Khaled turned and answered, speaking modestly but with much dignity in his manner.

'Ye men of Nejed, this is my marriage feast and I invite you all to be merry with me. Whether it shall please Allah to give me a long life, or whether it shall please him to take me this night I know not. We are in the hand of Allah. But this I do know. I will love you as my own people, seeing that I have no people of my own. I will fight for you as a man fights for his own soul, for his wife and for his children, and I will divide

justly the spoils in war, and give in peace whatsoever I am able, to all those who are in need. I swear by Allah! You are all witnesses.'

The courtiers and all the guests were much pleased with this short speech, for they saw that Khaled was a man of few words and not proud or overbearing, and none could look into his face and doubt his promise. For the present moment at least Zehowah's prediction had been verified, for no one was jealous of him, and there was but one party among them all and that was for him. So they all feasted together in harmony until the sun was low.

In the meantime Zehowah remained in the harem, surrounded by her women, and a separate meal was brought to them. They all sat upon the rich carpets leaning on cushions set against

the walls, and small low tables were brought in, covered with dishes and bowls containing delicately prepared rice and mutton in great abundance and fresh blanket bread, hot from the stones, and olives brought from Syria. Afterwards came sweetmeats without number, such as Hadji Mohammed knew how to prepare, and gold and silver goblets filled with a drink made from large sweet lemons and water, which is called 'treng.' Zehowah indeed ate sparingly, for she was accustomed to such dainties every day, but her women were delighted with the abundance and left nothing to be taken away.

While they were eating six of the women played upon musical instruments by turns, while others danced slow and graceful measures, singing as they moved, and describing the

unspeakable happiness which awaited their princess in marriage. Afterwards when the tables had been taken away and they had washed their hands with rose water from Ajjem, Zehowah commanded the singing and the dancing to cease, and the women brought her one by one the dresses which she was to wear before Khaled. They were very magnificent, for it had needed many years to prepare them, and a great weight of gold and silver threads had been weighed out to the tailors and embroiderers who had worked in the preparation of them ever since Zehowah had been two years old. For the piece of material is weighed first, and then the gold, and afterwards, when the work is finished, the whole is weighed together, lest the tailors should steal anything.

But Zehowah looked coldly at the garments, one after the other, as they were brought and taken away, and the women fancied that she was to be married to the stranger against her will, and that she remembered the Indian prince.

‘It is a pity,’ one of them ventured to say, ‘that the bridegroom has not brought any elephants with him, for we would have watched them from the balconies, since they are diverting beasts.’

‘And it is a pity,’ said Zehowah scornfully, ‘that my husband has not a round, soft face, like the moon in May, and the eyes of a gazelle and the heart of a hare. Truly, such a one would have made you a good king, seeing that he was also an unbeliever!’

‘Nay,’ said the woman humbly, ‘Allah forbid that I should make a comparison, or bring an ill omen on the day by speaking of that which chanced a year ago. Truly, I only spoke of elephants, and not of men. For, surely, we all said when we saw him in the court that he looked a brave warrior and a goodly man.’

Then a messenger came from the Sultan saying that it was time to make ready. So they went to another apartment, where the nuptial chamber had been prepared. The Sultan came, then, leading Khaled, and followed by the Kadi, and all the women veiled themselves while the latter read the declaration of marriage. After that they all withdrew and Khaled took his seat upon the high couch in the middle of the room. Presently all the women returned,

unveiled, with loud singing and playing of instruments, leading Zehowah dressed in the first of the dresses which she was to put on, and which, though it was very splendid, was of course the least magnificent of all those which had been prepared. But Khaled sat in his place looking on quietly, for he was acquainted with the custom, and he cared little for the rich garments, but looked always into Zehowah's face.

CHAPTER III

KHALED sat with his sword upon his feet, and when Zehowah was not in the room he played with the hilt and thought of all that was happening.

‘Truly,’ he said to himself, ‘Allah is great. Was I not, but a few days since, one of the genii condemned to perish at the day of the resurrection? And am I not now a man, married to the most beautiful woman in the whole world, and the wisest and the best, needing only to be loved by her in order to obtain an undying soul? And why should

this woman not love me? Truly, we shall see before long, when this mummary is finished.'

So he sat on the couch while Zehowah was led before him again and again each time in clothing more splendid than before, and each time with new songs and new music. But at the last time the attendants left her standing before him and went away, and only a very old woman remained at the door, screaming out in a cracked voice the customary exhortations. Then she, too, went away and the door was shut and Khaled and Zehowah were alone.

It was now near the middle of the night. The chamber was large and high, lighted by a number of hanging lamps such as are made in Bagdad, of brass perforated with beautiful

designs and filled with coloured glasses, in each of which a little wick floats upon oil. Upon the walls rich carpets were hung, both Arabian and Persian, some taken in war as booty, and some brought by merchants in time of peace. A brass chafing dish stood at some distance from the couch, and upon the coals the women had thrown powdered myrrh and benzoin before they went away. But Khaled cared little for these things, since he had seen all the treasures of the earth in their most secret depositories.

Zehowah had watched him narrowly during the ceremony of the dresses and had seen that he felt no surprise at anything which was brought before him.

‘His own country must be full of great

wealth and magnificence,' she thought, 'since so much treasure does not astonish him.' And she was disappointed.

Now that they were alone, he still sat in silence, gazing at her as she stood beside him, and not even thinking of any speech, for he was overcome and struck dumb by her eyes.

'You are not pleased with what I have shown you,' Zehowah said at last in a tone of displeasure and disappointment. 'And yet you have seen the wealth of my father's palace.'

'I have seen neither wealth nor treasure, neither rich garments, nor precious stones nor chains of gold nor embroideries of pearls,' Khaled answered slowly.

But Zehowah frowned and tapped the carpet impatiently with her foot where she stood, for

she was annoyed, having expected him to praise the beauty of her many dresses.

‘They who have eyes can see,’ she said. ‘But if you are not pleased, my father will give me a hundred dresses more beautiful than these, and pearls and jewels without end.’

‘I should not see them,’ Khaled replied. ‘I have seen two jewels which have dazzled me so that I can see nothing else.’

Zehowah gazed at him with a look of inquiry.

‘I have seen the eyes of Zehowah,’ he continued, ‘which are as the stars Sirius and Aldebaran, when they are over the desert in the nights of winter. What jewels can you show me like these?’

Then Zehowah laughed softly and sat down beside her husband on the edge of the couch.

‘Nevertheless,’ she said, ‘the dresses are very rich. You might admire them also.’

‘I will look at them when you are not near me, for then my sight will be restored for other things.’

Khaled took her hand in his and held it.

‘Tell me, Zehowah, will you love me?’ he asked in a soft voice.

‘You are my lord and my master,’ she answered, looking modestly downward, and her hand lay quite still.

She was so very beautiful that as Khaled sat beside her and looked at her downcast face, and knew that she was his, he could not easily believe that she was cold and indifferent to him.

‘By Allah!’ he thought, ‘can it be so

hard to get a woman's love? Truly, I think she begins to love me already.'

Zehowah looked up and smiled carelessly as though answering his question, but Khaled was obliged to admit in his heart that the answer lacked clearness, for he found it no easier to interpret a woman's smile than men had found it before him, and have found it since, even to this day.

'You have had many suitors,' he said at last, 'and it is said that your father has given you your own free choice, allowing you to see them and hear them speak while he was receiving them. Tell me why you have chosen me rather than the rest, unless it is because you love me? For I came with empty hands, and without servants or slaves, or retinue of any

kind, riding alone out of the Red Desert. It was therefore for myself that you took me.'

'You are right. It was for yourself that I took you.

'Then it was for love of me, was it not?'

'There were and still are many and good reasons,' answered Zehowah calmly, and at the same time withdrawing her hand from his and smoothing back the black hair from her forehead. 'I told them all to my father, and he was convinced.'

'Tell them to me also,' said Khaled.

So she explained all to him in detail, making him see everything as she saw it herself. And the explanation was so very clear, that Khaled felt a cold chill in his heart as he understood that she had chosen him rather for politic

reasons, than because she wished him for her husband.

‘And yet,’ she added at the end, ‘it was the will of Allah, for otherwise I would not have chosen you.’

‘But surely,’ he said, somewhat encouraged by these last words, ‘there was some love in the choice, too.’

‘How can I tell!’ she exclaimed, with a little laugh. ‘What is love?’

Finding himself confronted by such an amazing question, Khaled was silent, and took her hand again. For though many have asked what love is, no one has ever been able to find an answer in words to satisfy the questioner, seeing that the answer can have no more to do with words than love itself, a matter sufficiently

explained by a certain wise man, who understood the heart of man. If, said he, a man who loves a woman, or a woman who loves a man could give in words the precise reason why he or she loves, then love itself could be defined in language; but as no man or woman has ever succeeded in doing this, I infer that they who love best do not themselves know in what love consists—still less therefore can any one else know, wherefore the definition is impossible, and no one need waste time in trying to find it.

A certain wit has also said that although it be impossible for any man to explain the nature of love to many persons at the same time, he generally finds it easy to make his explanations to one person only. But this is

a mere quibbling jest and not deserving of any attention.

Zehowah expected an answer to her question, and Khaled was silent, not because he was as yet too little acquainted with the feelings of a man to give them expression, but because he already felt so much that it was hard for him to speak at all.

Zehowah laughed and shook her head, for she was not of a timid temper.

‘How can you expect me to say that I love you, when you yourself are unable to answer such a simple question?’ she asked. ‘And besides, are you not my lord and my master? What is it then to you, whether I love you or not?’

But again Khaled was silent, debating whether

he should tell her the truth, how the angel had promised in Allah's name that if she loved him he should obtain an undying soul, and how the task of obtaining her love had been laid upon him as a sort of atonement for having slain the Indian prince. But as he reflected he understood that this would probably estrange her all the more from him.

‘Yet I can answer your question,’ he said at last. ‘What is love? It is that which is in me for you only.’

‘But how am I to know what that is?’ asked Zehowah, drawing up the smooth gold bracelets upon her arm and letting them fall down to her wrist, so that they jangled like a camel's bell.

‘If you love me you will know,’ Khaled

answered, 'for then, perhaps, you will feel a tenth part of what I feel.'

'And why not all that you feel?' she asked, looking at him, but still playing with the bracelets.

'Because it is impossible for any woman to love as much as I love you, Zehowah.'

'You mean, perhaps, that a woman is too weak to love so well,' she suggested. 'And you think, perhaps, that we are weak because we sit all our lives upon the carpets in the harem eating sweetmeats, and listening to singing girls and to old women who tell us tales of long ago. Yet there have been strong women too—as strong as men. Kenda, who tore out the heart of Kamsa—was she weak?'

'Women are stronger to hate than to love,' said Khaled.

‘But a man can forget his hatred in the love of a woman, and his strength also,’ laughed Zehowah. ‘I would rather that you should not love me at all, than that you should forget to be strong in the day of battle. For I have married you that you may lead my people to war and bring home the spoil.’

‘And if I destroy all your enemies and the enemies of your people, will you love me then, Zehowah?’

‘Why should I love you then, more than now? What has war to do with love? Again, I ask, what is it to you whether I love you or not? Am I not your wife, and are you not my master? What is this love of which you talk? Is it a rich garment that you can wear? A precious stone that you can fasten in

your turban? A rich carpet to spread in your house? A treasure of gold, a mountain of ambergris, a bushel of pearls from Oman? Why do you covet it? Am I not beautiful enough? Then is love henna to make my hair bright, or kohl to darken my eyes, or a boiled egg with almonds to smooth my face? I have all these things, and ointments from Egypt, and perfumes from Syria, and if I am not beautiful enough to please you, it is the will of Allah, and love will not make me fairer.'

'Yet love is beauty,' Khaled answered. 'For Kadijah was lovely in the eyes of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, because she loved him, though she was a widow and old.'

'Am I a widow? Am I old?' asked Ze-

howah with some indignation. 'Do I need the imaginary cosmetic you call love to smooth my wrinkles, to lighten my eyes, or to make my teeth white?'

'No. You need nothing to make you beautiful.'

'And for the matter of that, I can say it of you. You tell me that you love me. Is it love that makes your body tall and straight, your beard black, your forehead smooth, your hand strong? Would not any woman see what I see, whether you loved her or not? See! Is your hand whiter than mine because you love and I do not?'

She laughed again as she held her hand beside his.

'Truly,' thought Khaled, 'it is less easy than

I supposed. For the heart of a woman who does not love is like the desert, when the wind blows over it, and there are neither tracks nor landmarks. And I am wandering in this desert like a man seeking lost camels.'

But he said nothing, for he was not yet skilled in the arguments of love. Thereupon Zehowah smiled, and resting her cheek upon her hand, looked into his face, as though saying scornfully, 'Is it not all vanity and folly?'

Khaled sighed, for he was disappointed, as a thirsty man who, coming to drink of a clear spring, finds the water bitter, while his thirst increases and grows unbearable.

'Why do you sigh?' Zehowah asked, after a little silence. 'Are you weary? Are you tired with the feasting? Are you full of bitter-

ness, because I do not love you? Command me and I will obey. Are you not my lord to whom I am subject?’

He did not speak, but she drew him to her, so that his head rested upon her bosom, and she began to sing to him in a low voice.

For a long time Khaled kept his eyes shut, listening to her voice. Then, on a sudden, he looked up, and without speaking so much as a word, he clasped her in his arms and kissed her.

Before it was day there was a great tumult in the streets of Riad, of which the noise came up even to the chamber where Khaled and Zehowah were sleeping. Zehowah awoke and listened, wondering what had happened and trying to understand the cries of the distant

multitude. Then she laid her hand upon Khaled's forehead and waked him.

‘What is it?’ he asked.

‘It is war,’ she answered. ‘The enemy have surprised the city in the night of the feast. Arise and take arms and go out to the people.’

Khaled sprang up and in a moment he was clothed and had girt on his sword. Then he took Zehowah in his arms.

‘While I live, you are safe,’ he said.

‘Am I afraid? Go quickly,’ she answered.

At that time the Sultan of Nejed was at war with the northern tribes of Shammar, and the enemy had taken advantage of the month of Ramadhan, in which few persons travel, to advance in great numbers to Riad. During the three days’ feast of Bairam they had moved on

every night, slaying the inhabitants of the villages so that not one had escaped to bring the news, and in the daytime they had hidden themselves wherever they could find shelter. But in the night in which Khaled and Zehowah were married they reached the very walls of the city, and waiting until all the people were asleep, a party of them had climbed up upon the ramparts and had opened one of the gates to their companions after killing the guards.

Khaled found his mare and mounted her without saddle or bridle in his haste, then drawing his sabre he rode swiftly out of the palace into the confusion. The enemy with their long spears were driving the panicstricken guards and the shrieking people before them towards the palace, slaughtering all whom they overtook, so

that the gutters of the streets were already flowing with blood, and the horses of the enemy stumbled over the bodies of the defenders. The whole multitude of the pursued and the pursuers were just breaking out of the principal street into the open space before the palace when Khaled met them, a single man facing ten thousand.

‘I shall certainly perish in this fight,’ he said to himself, ‘and yet I shall not receive the reward of the faithful, since Allah has not given me a soul. Nevertheless certain of these dogs shall eat dirt before the rest get into the palace.’

So he pressed his legs to the bare sides of his mare and lifted up his sword and rode at the foe, having neither buckler, nor helmet, nor shirt

of mail to protect him, but only his clothes and his turban. But his arm was strong, and it has been said by the wise that it is better to fall upon an old lion with a reed than to stand armed in the way of a man who seeks death.

‘Yallah! The Sword of the Lord!’ shouted Khaled, in such a terrible voice that the assailants ceased to kill for a moment, and the terrified guards turned to see whence so great a voice could proceed; and some who had seen Khaled recognised him and ran to meet him, and the others followed.

When the enemy saw a single man riding towards them across the great square before the palace, they sent up a shout of derision, and turned again to the slaughter of such of the inhabitants as could not extricate themselves.

‘Shall one man stop an army?’ they said.
‘Shall a fox turn back a herd of hyænas?’

But when Khaled was among them they found less matter for laughter. For the sword was keen, the mare was swift to double and turn, and Khaled’s hand was strong. In the twinkling of an eye two of the enemy lay dead, the one cloven to the chin, the other headless.

Then a strange fever seized Khaled, such as he had not heard of, and all things turned to scarlet before his eyes, both the walls of the houses, and the faces and the garments of his foes. Men who saw him say that his face was white and shining in the dawn, and that the flashing of the sword was like a storm of lightning about his head, and after each flash there was a great rain of blood, and a crashing like

thunder as the horses and men of the enemy fell to the earth.

In the meantime, too, the soldiers of the city and the Bedouins of the desert who were within the walls for the feast, took courage, and turning fiercely began to drive the assailants back by the way they had come, towards the market-place in the bazar. But those behind still kept pressing forward, while those in front were driven back, and the press became so great that the Shammars could no longer wield their weapons. The enemy were crowded together like sheep in a fold, and Khaled, with his men, began to cut a broad road through the very midst of them, hewing them down in ranks and throwing them aside, as corn is harvested in Egypt.

But after some time Khaled saw that he was alone, with a few followers, surrounded by a great throng of the enemy, for some of his men had been slain after slaying many of their foes, and some had not been able to follow, being hindered at first by the heaps of dead and afterwards by the multitude of their opponents who closed in again over the bloody way through which Khaled had passed.

And now the Shammars saw that Khaled could not escape them, and they pressed him on every side, but the archers dared not shoot at him for fear of hitting their own friends, if their arrows chanced to go by the mark. Otherwise he would undoubtedly have perished, since he had no armour, and not even a buckler with which to ward off the darts. But they thrust

at him with spears and struck at him with their swords, and wounded him more than once, though he was not conscious of pain or loss of blood, being hot with the fever of the fight. He was hard pressed therefore, and while he smote without ceasing he began to know that unless a speedy rescue came to him, his hour was at hand. From the borders of the market-place, the men of Riad could still see his sword flashing and striking, and they still heard his fierce cry.

He looked about him as he fought, and he saw that he was now almost alone. One after another, the few who had penetrated so far forward with him into the press, were overwhelmed by numbers and fell bleeding from a hundred wounds till only a score were left, and Khaled saw that unless he could now cut his

way free, he must inevitably perish. But the press was stubborn and a man might as well hope to make his way through a herd of camels crowded together in a narrow street. Then Khaled bethought him of a stratagem. He alone was on horseback, for the enemy's riders had ridden before, and he had met them in the street leading to the palace, when he had himself slain many, and where the rest were even now falling under the swords of the men of Riad. And the few men who were with him were also all on foot. Therefore looking across the market-place he made as though he saw a great force coming to his assistance, and he shouted with all his breath, while his arm never rested.

‘Smite, men of Nejed!’ he cried. ‘For I

see the Sultan himself coming to meet us with five hundred horsemen! Smite! Yallah! It is the Sword of the Lord!’

Hearing these words, his men were encouraged, and of the enemy many turned their heads to see the new danger. But being on foot they were hindered from seeing by the throng. Yet so much the more Khaled shouted that the Sultan was coming, and many of the heads that turned to look were not turned back again, but rolled down to the feet of those to whom they had belonged. The brave men who were with Khaled took heart and hewed with all their might, taking up the cry of their leader when they saw that it disconcerted their foes, so that the last took fright, and the panic ran through the whole multitude.

‘We shall be slain like sheep, and taken like locusts under a mantle, for we cannot move!’ they cried, and they began to press away out of the market-place, forcing their comrades before them into the narrow streets.

But here many perished. For while every man in Riad had taken his sword and had gone out of his house to fight, the women had dragged up cauldrons of boiling water, and also hand-mill stones, to the roofs, and they scalded and crushed their retreating foes. Then too, as the market-place was cleared, the soldiers came on from the side of the palace, having slain all that stood in their way and taken most of their horses alive, which alone was a great booty, for there are not many horses in Nejed besides those of the Sultan, though these are the very best

and fleetest in all Arabia. But the Shammars of the north are great horse-breeders. So the soldiers mounted and joined Khaled in the pursuit, and a great slaughter followed in the streets, though some of the enemy were able to escape to the gates, and warn those of their fellows who were outside to flee to the hills for safety, leaving much booty behind.

At the time of the second call to prayer Khaled dismounted from his mare in the market-place, and there was not one of the enemy left alive within the walls. Those who remember that day say that there were five thousand dead in the streets in Riad.

Khaled made such ablution as he could, and having prayed and given thanks to Allah, he went back on foot to the palace, his bay mare

following him, and thrusting her nose into his hand as he walked. For she was little hurt, and the blood that covered her shoulders and her flanks was not her own. But Khaled had many wounds on him, so that his companions wondered how he was able to walk.

In the court of the palace the Sultan came to meet him, and fell upon his neck and embraced him, for many messengers had come, from time to time, telling how the fight went, and of the great slaughter. And Khaled smiled, for he thought that he should now win the love of Zehowah.

‘Said I not truly that he is as brave as the lion, and as strong as the camel?’ cried the Sultan, addressing those who stood in the court. ‘Has he not scattered our enemies as the wind

scatters the sand? Surely he is well called by the name Khaled.'

'Forget not your own men,' Khaled answered, 'for they have shared in the danger and have slain more than I, and deserve the spoil. There was a score of stout fellows with me at the last in the market-place, whose faces I should know again on a cloudy night. They fought as well as I, and it was the will of Allah that their enemies should broil everlastingly and drink boiling water. Let them be rewarded.'

'They shall every one have a rich garment and a sum of money, besides their share of the spoil. But as for you, my beloved son, go in and rest, and bind up your wounds, and afterwards there shall be feasting and merriment until the night.'

‘The enemy is not destroyed yet,’ answered Khaled. ‘Command rather that the army make ready for the pursuit, and when I have washed I will arm myself and we will ride out and pursue the dogs until not one of them is left alive, and by the help of Allah we will take all Shammar and lay it under tribute and bring back the women captive. After that we shall feast more safely, and sleep without fear of being waked by a herd of hyænas in our streets.’

‘Nay, but you must rest before going upon this expedition,’ objected the Sultan.

‘The true believer will find rest in the grave, and feasting in paradise,’ answered Khaled.

‘This is true. But even the camel must eat and drink on the journey, or both he and his master will perish.’

‘Let us then eat and drink quickly, that we may the sooner go.’

‘As you will, let it be,’ said the Sultan, with a sigh, for he loved feasting and music, being now too old to go out and fight himself as he had formerly done.

Thereupon Khaled went into the harem and returned to Zehowah’s apartment. As he went the women gathered round him with cries of gladness and songs of triumph, staunching the blood that flowed from his wounds with their veils and garments as he walked. And others ran before to prepare the bath and to tell Zehowah of his coming.

When she saw him she ran forward and took him by the hands and led him in, and herself she bathed his wounds and bound them

up with precious balsams of great healing power, not suffering any of the women to help her nor to touch him, but sending them away so that she might be alone with Khaled.

‘I have slain certain of your enemies, Zehowah,’ he said, at last, ‘and I have driven out the rest from the city.’ As yet neither of them had spoken.

‘Do you think that I have not heard what you have done?’ Zehowah asked. ‘You have saved us all from death and captivity. You are our father and our mother. And now I will bring you food and drink and afterwards you shall sleep.’

‘So you are well pleased with the doings of the husband you have married,’ he said.

He was displeased, for he had supposed that she would love him for his deeds and for

his wounds and that she would speak differently. But though she tended him and bound his wounds, and bathed his brow with perfumed waters, and laid pillows under his head and fanned him, as a slave might have done, he saw that there was no warmth in her cheek, and that the depths of her eyes were empty, and that her hands were neither hot nor cold. By all these signs he knew that she felt no love for him, so he spoke coldly to her.

‘Is it for me to be pleased or displeased with the deeds of my lord and master?’ she asked. ‘Nevertheless, thousands are even now blessing your name and returning thanks to Allah for having sent them a preserver in the hour of danger. I am but one of them.’

‘I would rather see a faint light in your

eyes, as of a star rising in the desert, than hear the blessings of all the men of Nejed. I would rather that your hand were cold when it touches mine, and your cheek hot when I kiss it, than that your father should bestow upon me all the treasures of Riad.'

'Is that love?' asked Zehowah with a laugh. 'A cold hand, a hot cheek, a bright eye?'

Khaled was silent, for he saw that she understood his words but not his meaning. It was now noon and it was very hot, even in the inner shade of the harem, and Khaled was glad to rest after the hard fighting, for his many slight wounds smarted with the healing balsam, and his heart was heavy and discontented.

Then Zehowah called a slave woman to fan

him with a palm leaf, and presently she brought him meat and rice and dates to eat, and cool drink in a golden cup, and she sat at his feet while he refreshed himself.

‘How many did you slay with your own hand?’ she asked at last, taking up the good sword which lay beside him on the carpet.

CHAPTER IV

KHALED pondered deeply, being uncertain what to do, and trying to find out some action which could win for him what he wanted. Zehowah received no answer to her question as to the number of enemies he had slain and she did not ask again, for she thought that he was weary and wished to rest in silence.

‘What do you like best in the whole world?’ he asked after a long time, to see what she would say.

‘I like you best,’ she answered, smiling, while she still played with his sword.

‘That is very strange,’ Khaled answered, musing. But the colour rose darkly in his cheeks above his beard, for he was pleased now as he had been displeased before.

‘Why is it strange?’ asked Zehowah. ‘Are you not the palm tree in my plain, and a tower of refuge for my people?’

‘And will you dry up the well from which the tree draws life, and take away the cornerstone of the tower’s foundation?’

‘You speak in fables,’ said Zehowah, laughing.

‘Yet you imagined the fable yourself, when you likened me to a palm and to a tower. But I am no lover of allegories. The sword is my argument, and my wit is in my arm. The wall by the tree is the wall of love, and the chief foundation of the tower is the love of Zehowah.

If you destroy that, the tree will wither and the tower will fall.'

'Surely there was never such a man as you,' Zehowah answered, half jesting but half in earnest. 'You are as one who has bought a white mare; and though she is fleet, and good to look at, and obedient to his voice and knee, yet he is discontented because she cannot speak to him, and he would fain have her black instead of white, and if possible would teach her to sing like a Persian night-ingle.'

'Is it then not natural in a woman to love man? Have you heard no tales of love from the story-tellers of the harem?'

'I have heard many such tales, but none of them were told of me,' Zehowah replied. 'Will

you drink again? Is the drink too sweet, or is it not cool?’

She had risen from her seat and held the golden cup, bending down to him, so that her face was near his. He laid his hand upon her shoulder.

‘Hear me, Zehowah,’ he said. ‘I want but one thing in the world, and it was for that I came out of the Red Desert to be your husband. And that thing I will have, though the price be greater than rubies, or than blood, or than life itself.’

‘If it is mine, I freely give it to you. If it is not mine, take it by force, or I will help you to take it by a stratagem, if I can. Am I not your wife?’

She spoke thus, supposing from his face that

he meant some treasure that could be taken by strength or by wile, for she could not believe a man could speak so seriously of a mere thought such as love.

‘Neither my right hand nor your wit can give me this, but only your heart, Zehowah,’ he answered, still holding her and looking at her.

But now she did not laugh, for she saw that he was greatly in earnest.

‘You are still talking of love,’ she said. ‘And you are not jesting. I do not know what to answer you. Gladly will I say, I love you. Is that all? What is it else? Are those the words?’

‘I care little for the words. But I will have the reality, though it cost your life and mine.’

‘My life? Will you take my life, for the sake of a thought?’

‘A thought!’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you call love a thought? I had not believed a woman could be so cold as that.’

‘If not a thought, what then? I have spoken the truth. If it were a treasure, or anything that can be taken, you could take it, and I could help you. But if the possibility of possessing it lie not in deeds, it lies in thoughts, and is itself a thought. If you can teach me, I will think what you will; but if you cannot teach me, who shall? And how will it profit you to take my life or your own?’

‘Is it possible that love is only a thought?’ asked Khaled, speaking rather to himself than to her.

‘It must be,’ she answered. ‘The body is what it is in the eyes of others, but the soul is what it thinks itself to be, happy or unhappy, loving or not loving.’

‘You are too subtle for me, Zehowah,’ Khaled said. ‘Yet I know that this is not all true.’

For he knew that he possessed no soul, and yet he loved her. Moreover he could think himself happy or unhappy.

‘You are too subtle,’ he repeated. ‘I will take my sword again and I will go out and fight, and pursue the enemy and waste their country, for it is not so hard to cut through steel as to touch the heart of a woman who does not love, and it is easier to tear down towers and strongholds of stone with the naked

hands than to build a temple upon the moving sand of an empty heart.'

Khaled would have risen at once, but Zehowah took his hand and entreated him to stay with her.

'Will you go out in the heat of the day, wounded and wearied?' she asked. 'Surely you will take a fever and die before you have followed the Shammars so far as two days' journey.'

'My wounds are slight, and I am not weary,' Khaled answered. 'When the smith has heated the iron in the forge, does he wait until it is cold before striking?'

'But think also of the soldiers, who have striven hard, and cannot thus go out upon a great expedition without preparation as well as rest.'

‘I will take those whom I can find. And if they will go with me, it is well. But if not, I will go alone, and they and the rest will follow after.’

‘It is summer, too,’ said Zehowah, keeping him back. ‘Is this a time to go out into the northern desert? Both men and beasts will perish by the way.’

‘Has not Allah bound every man’s fate about his neck? And can a man cast it from him?’

‘I know not otherwise, but if heat and hunger and thirst do not kill the men, they will certainly destroy the beasts, whose names are not recorded by Asrael, and who have no destiny of their own.’

‘You hinder me,’ said Khaled. ‘And yet you do not know how many of the Shammar may be

yet lurking within a day's march of the city, slaying your people, burning their houses and destroying their harvest. Let me go. Will you love me better if I stay ?'

'You will be the better able to get the victory.'

'Will you love me better if I stay ?'

'If you go now, you may fail in your purpose and perish as well. How could I love you at all then ?'

'It is the victory you love then—not me ?'

'Could I love defeat? Nay, do not be angry with me. Stay here at least until the evening. Think of the burning sun and the raging thirst and the smarting of your wounds which have only been dressed this first time. Think of the soldiers, too——'

'They can bear what I can bear. Was it not

summer-time when the Prophet went out against the Romans?’

‘I do not know. Stay with me, Khaled.’

‘I will come back when I have destroyed the Shammars.’

‘And if the soldiers will not go with you, will you indeed go out alone?’

‘Yes. I will go alone. When they see that they will follow me. They are not foxes. They are brave men.’

Khaled rose and girt his sword about him. Zehowah helped him, seeing that she could not persuade him to stay.

‘Farewell,’ he said, shortly, and without so much as touching her hand he turned and went out. She followed him to the door of the room and stood watching as he went away.

‘One of us two was to rule,’ she said to herself, ‘and it is he, for I cannot move him. But what is this talk of love? Does he need love, who is himself the master?’

She sighed and went back to the carpet on which they had been sitting. Then she called in her women and bid them tell her all they had heard about the fight in the morning; and they, thinking to please her, extolled the deeds of Khaled and of the tens he had slain they made hundreds, and of the thousands of the enemy’s army, they made tens of thousands, till the walls of Riad could not have contained the hosts of which they spoke, and the dry sand of the desert could not have drunk all the blood which had been shed.

Meanwhile Khaled went into the outer court

of the palace, where many soldiers were congregated together in the shade of the high wall, eating camel's meat and blanket bread and drinking the water from the well. They were all able-bodied and unhurt, for those who had been wounded were at their houses, tended by their wives.

‘Men of Riad!’ cried Khaled, standing before them. ‘We have fought a good fight this morning and the power of our foes is broken. But all are not yet destroyed, and it may be that there are many thousands still lurking within a day's march of the city, slaying the people, burning their houses and destroying their harvests. Let us go out and kill them all before they are able to go back to their own country. Afterwards we will pursue those who are already

escaping, and we will lay all the tribes of Shammars under tribute and bring back the women captive.'

Thereupon a division arose among the soldiers. Some were for going at once with Khaled, but others said it was the hot season and no time for war.

'It is indeed summer,' said Khaled. 'But if the Shammars were able to come to Riad in the heat, the men of Riad are able to go to them. And I at least will go at once, and those who wish to share the spoil will go with me, but those who are satisfied to sit in the shade and eat camel's meat will stay behind. In an hour's time I will ride out of the northern gate.'

So saying, Khaled rode slowly down into the city towards the market-place. The people were

carrying away their own dead, and dragging off the bodies of their enemies, with camels, by fours and fives tied together to bury them in a great ditch without the walls. When Khaled appeared, many of the men gathered round him, with cries of joy, for they had supposed that some of his wounds were dangerous and that they should not see him for many days.

‘Wallah! He is with us again!’ they shouted, jostling each other to get near, and standing on tiptoe to see the good mare that had carried him so well in the fight.

‘Masallah! I am with you,’ answered Khaled, ‘and if you will go with me we will send many more of the Shammars to eat thorns and thistles, as many as dwell in Kasim and Tabal Shammar as far as Hail; and by the help of Allah we will

take the city of Hail itself and divide the spoil and bring away the women captive ; and when we have taken all that there is we will lay the land under tribute and make it subject to Nejed. So let those who will go with me arm themselves and take every man his horse or his camel, and dates and barley and water-skins, and in an hour's time we will ride out. For Allah will certainly give us the victory.'

'Let us bury the dead to-day and to-morrow we will go,' said many of those nearest to him.

'Are there no old men and boys in Riad to bind the sheaves you have mown?' asked Khaled. 'And are there no women to mourn over the dead of your kindred who have fallen in a good fight? And as for to-morrow, it is yet in Allah's hand. But to-day we have already with us.

However, if you will not go with me, I will go alone.'

The men were pleased with Khaled's speech, and indeed the greater part of the dead were buried by this time, for all the people had made haste to the work, fearing lest the bodies should bring a pestilence among them, since it was summer-time and very hot. Then all those who were unhurt and could bear arms, went and washed themselves, and took their weapons and food, as Khaled had directed them. Before the call to afternoon prayers the whole host went out of the northern gate.

Then Khaled accomplished all that he had spoken of, and much more, for he drove the scattered force of the enemy before him, overtaking all at last and slaying all whom he

overtook as far as Zulfah which is by the narrow end of the Nefud. Here he rested a short time, and then quickly crossing the sand, he entered the country called Kasim which is subject to the Shammars. Here he was told by a woman who had been taken that the Shammars were coming with a new army against him out of Hail. He therefore hid his host in a pass of the hills just above the plain, and sent down a few Bedouins to encamp at the foot of the mountains, bidding them call themselves Shammars and make a show of being friendly to the enemy. So when the army of the Shammars reached the foot of the hills, they saw the tents and only one or two camels, and Khaled's Bedouins came out and welcomed them, and told them that Khaled was still crossing

the Nefud, and that if they made haste through the hills they might come upon him unawares and at an advantage as he began to ascend. Thereupon the enemy rejoiced and entered the pass in haste, after filling their water-skins.

When they were in the midst of the hills, Khaled and his army sprang up from the ambush and fell upon them, and utterly destroyed them, taking all their horses and camels and arms; after which he went down into the plain and laid waste the country about Hail. He took the city as the Shammars had taken Riad. For he himself got upon the wall at night, with the strongest and the bravest of his followers, and slew the guards and opened the gate just before the dawn. But there was no Khaled in Hail to rally the soldiers and give

them heart to turn and make a stand in the streets.

Khaled then entered the palace and took the Sultan of Shammar alive, not suffering him to be hurt, for he wished to bring him to Riad. This Sultan was a man of middle age, having only one eye, and also otherwise ill-favoured, besides being cowardly and fat. So Khaled ordered that he should be put into a litter, and the litter into a cage, and the cage slung between two camels. But he commanded that the women of the harem should be well treated and brought before him, that he might see them, intending to bring back the most beautiful of them as presents to his father-in-law.

‘Surely,’ said the men who were with him, ‘you will keep the fairest for yourself.’

But Khaled turned angrily upon them.

‘Have I not lately married the most beautiful woman in the world?’ he asked. ‘I tell you it is for her sake that I have destroyed the Shammars. But the Sultan shall have the best of these women, and afterwards the rest of them will be divided amongst you by lot.’

When the women heard that they were to be distributed among the men of Nejed they at first made a pretence of howling and beating their breasts, but they rejoiced secretly and soon began to laugh and talk among themselves, pointing out to each other the strongest and most richly dressed of Khaled’s followers, as though choosing husbands among them. But one of them neither wept nor spoke to her companions, but stood silently watching Khaled, and

when he sat down upon a carpet in the chief kahwah of the house, she brought him drink in a goblet set with pearls from Katar, and sat down at his feet as though she had been his wife. But he took little heed of her at first, for he was busy with grave matters.

The other women, seeing what she did, thought that she was acting wisely in the hope of gaining Khaled's favour, seeing that he was the chief of their enemies, so they, too, came near, and brought water for his hands, and perfumes, and sweetmeats, thinking to outdo her. But she pushed them away, taking what they brought for him, and offering it herself.

'Are you better than we?' the women said angrily. 'Has our lord chosen you for himself, that you will not let us come near him?'

Then Khaled noticed her and began to wonder at her attention and zeal.

‘What is your name?’ he asked. But she did not speak. ‘Who is she?’ he inquired of the other women.

‘She is an unbeliever,’ they answered contemptuously. ‘And she is proud, for she trusts in her white skin and her blue eyes, and her hair which is red without henna. She thinks she is better than we. Command us to uncover our faces, that you may see and judge between us.’

‘Let it be so. Let us see who is the fairest,’ said Khaled, and he laughed.

Then the woman who sat at his feet threw aside her veil, and all the others did the same. Khaled saw that the one was certainly more beautiful than the rest, for her skin was as

white as milk, and her eyes like the sea of Oman when it is blue in winter. She had also long hair, plaited in three tresses which came down to her feet, red as the locusts when the sun shines upon them at evening, and not dyed.

‘There is a bay mare in a stable of black ones,’ Khaled said. ‘What is the name of the bay mare?’

‘Her name is Aziz, and she is a Christian,’ said one of the women.

‘Not Aziz — Almasta,’ said the beautiful woman in an accent which showed that she could not speak Arabic fluently. ‘Almasta, a Christian.’

‘She was lately sent as a present to our master by the Emir of Basrah,’ said one of the others.

‘He paid a thousand and five hundred sequins for her, for she was brought from Georgia,’ said another. ‘But I am a free woman, and myself the daughter of an emir.’

Then all the others began to scream.

‘It is a lie,’ they cried. ‘Your father was a white slave from Syria.’

‘You are fools,’ retorted the woman who had spoken. ‘You should have said that you were also free women and the daughters of emirs. So our lord would have treated you with more consideration.’

The others saw their folly and were silent and drew back, but Khaled only smiled.

‘As good mares are bred in the stable as in the desert,’ he said, and the women laughed with him at the jest, for they saw that it pleased him.

But Almasta was silent and sat at his feet, looking into his face.

‘You must learn to talk in Arabic,’ he said, ‘and then you will be able to tell stories of your native country to the Sultan, for he loves tales of travel.’

Almasta smiled and bent her head a little, but she did not understand all he said, being but lately come into Arabia.

‘I will go with you,’ she answered.

‘Yes. You will go with me to Riad to the Sultan, and perhaps he will make you his wife, for he has none at present.’

‘I will go with you,’ she repeated, looking at him.

‘She does not understand you,’ said the women, laughing at her ignorance of their own tongue.

‘It is no matter,’ said Khaled. ‘She will learn in due time. Perhaps it has pleased Allah to send my lord the Sultan a wife without a tongue for a blessing in his old age.’

‘I will go with you,’ Almasta said again.

‘She can say nothing else,’ jeered the women.

One of them pulled her by her upper garment, so that she looked round.

‘Can you say this, “My father was a dog and the son of dogs”?’ asked the woman.

But Almasta pushed her angrily away, for she half understood. Then the woman grew angry too, and shook her fist in Almasta’s face.

‘If you fight, you shall eat sticks,’ said Khaled, and then they were all quiet.

Thus he took possession of the city of Hail

and remaining there some time he reduced all the country to submission, so that it remained a part of the kingdom of Nejed for many years after that. For the power of the Shammars was broken, and they could nowhere have mustered a thousand men able to bear arms. Khaled set a governor in the place of the Sultan and ordered all the laws of the country in the same manner as those of Nejed, and after he had been absent from Riad nearly two months, he set aside a part of his force to remain behind and keep the peace in case there should be an outbreak, and with the rest he began to journey homeward, taking a great spoil and many captives with him.

During the march most of the women captives rode on camels, but a few of the most

beautiful were taken in litters lest the fatigues of riding should injure their appearance and thus diminish their value. Almasta was one of these, and the Sultan of Hail was taken in a cage as has been said, though he was not otherwise ill-treated, and received his portion of camel's meat and bread, equal to that of the soldiers.

Khaled sent messengers on fleet mares to Riad to give warning of his coming, but he could not himself proceed very quickly, because his army was burdened with so much spoil ; and as there was now no haste to overtake an enemy he journeyed chiefly at night, resting during the day wherever there was water, for although the summer was far advanced it was still hot. He thought continually of Zehowah,

by day in his tent and by night on the march, for he supposed that she would be glad when she heard of the victory and that she would now love him, because he had avenged her people, and taken Hail, and brought back gold and captives, besides other treasures.

‘She was already pleased with my deeds, before we left Riad,’ he thought, ‘for she asked me how many of the Shammars I had slain with my own hand, and at the last she wished me to stay with her, most probably that I might tell her more about the fight. How much the more will she be glad now, since I have killed so many more and have brought back treasure, and made a whole country subject to her father. Shall not blood and gold buy the love of a woman?’

It chanced once during this journey that

Khaled was sitting at the door of his tent after the sun had gone down and before the night march had begun. Upon the one side, at a little distance, was the tent of the women captives who had been taken from the palace in Haïl, and upon the other the soldiers had set down the cage in which the Sultan of Shammar was carried. The men had laid a carpet over the cage to keep the sun from the prisoner during the heat of the day, lest he should not reach Riad alive as Khaled desired. For the Sultan was fat and of a choleric temper. Now the soldiers had given him food but had forgotten to bring him water, and it was hot under the carpet now that the evening had come. But he could lift it up a little on one side, and having done so, he began to cry out, cursing Khaled

and railing at him, not knowing that he was so near at hand.

‘Oh you whose portion it shall be to broil everlastingly, and to eat thistles and thorns, and to lie bound in red-hot chains as I lie in this cage! Have you brought me out into the desert to die of thirst like a lame camel? Surely your entertainment on the day of judgment shall be boiling water and the fruit of Al Zakkam, and whenever you try to get out of hell you shall be dragged back again and beaten with iron clubs, and your skin shall dissolve, and the boiling water shall be poured upon your head!’

In this way the captive cried out, for he was very thirsty. But when Khaled saw that no one gave him water he called in the darkness to the women who sat by their tent.

‘Fetch water and give the man to drink,’ he said.

One of the women rose quickly and filled a jar at the well close by, and took it to the cage. But then the railing and cursing broke out afresh, so that Khaled wondered what had happened.

‘Who has sent me this unbelieving woman to torture me with thirst?’ cried the prisoner. ‘Are you not Aziz whom I was about to take for my fourth wife on account of your red hair? But your hair shall be a perpetual flame hereafter, burning the bones of your head, and your flesh shall be white with heat as iron in a forge. If I were still in my kingdom you should eat many sticks! If Allah delivers me from my enemies I will cause your skin to be embroidered with gold for a trapping to my horse!’

The moon rose at this time, being a little past the full, and Khaled looked towards the cage and saw that the woman was standing two paces away from the Sultan's outstretched hand. She dabbled in the cool water with her fingers so that a plashing sound was heard, and then drank herself, and scattered afterwards a few drops in the face of the thirsty captive.

‘It is good water,’ she said. ‘It is cold.’

Khaled knew from her broken speech that it was Almasta, and he understood that she was torturing the prisoner with the sound and sight of the water, and with her words. So he rose from his place and went to the cage.

‘Did I not tell you to give him drink?’ he asked, standing before the woman.

‘Oh my lord, be merciful,’ cried the captive,

when he saw that Khaled himself was there. 'Be merciful and let me drink, for your heart is easily moved to pity, and by an act of charity you shall hereafter sit in the shade of the tree Sedrat and drink for ever of the wine of paradise.'

'I do not desire wine,' said Khaled. 'But you shall certainly not thirst. Give him the jar,' he said to Almasta. But she shook her head.

'He is bad and ugly,' she said. 'If he does not drink, he will die.'

Then Khaled put out his hand to take the jar of water, but Almasta threw it violently to the ground, and it broke to pieces. Thereupon the captive began again to rail and curse at Almasta and to implore Khaled with many blessings.

'You shall drink, for I will bring water my-

self,' said Khaled. He went back to his tent and took his own jar to the well, and filled it carefully.

When he turned he saw that Almasta was running from his tent towards the cage, with a drawn sword in her hand. He then ran also, and being very swift of foot, he overtook her just as she thrust at the Sultan through the bars. But the sword caught in the folds of the soft carpet, and Khaled took it from her hand, and thrust her down so that she fell upon her knees. Then he gave the prisoner the jar with the water that remained in it, for some had been spilt as he ran.

'Who has given you the right to kill my captives?' he asked of Almasta.

'Kill me, then!' she cried.

'Indeed, if you were not so valuable, I would

cut off your head,' Khaled answered. 'Why do you wish me to kill you?'

'I hate him,' she said, pointing to the captive who was drinking like a thirsty camel.

'That is no reason why I should kill you. Go back to the tents.'

But Almasta laid her hand on the sword he held and tried to bring it to her own throat.

'This is a strange woman,' said Khaled. 'Why do you wish to die? You shall go to Riad and be the Sultan's wife.'

'No, no!' she cried. 'Kill me! Not him, not him!'

'Of whom do you speak?'

'Him!' she answered, again pointing to the prisoner. 'Is he not the Sultan?'

Khaled laughed aloud, for he saw that she

had supposed she was to be taken to Riad to be made the wife of the Sultan of Shammar. Indeed, the other women had told her so, to anger her.

‘Not this man,’ he said, endeavouring to make her understand. ‘There is another Sultan at Riad. The Sultan of Shammar is one, the Sultan of Nejed another.’

‘You?’ she asked, suddenly springing up. ‘With you?’

The moon was bright and Khaled saw that her eyes gleamed like stars and her face grew warm, and when she took his hands her own were cold.

‘No, not I,’ he answered. ‘I am not the Sultan.’

But her face became grey in the moonlight,

and she covered her head with her veil and went slowly back to her tent.

‘This woman loves me,’ Khaled thought. ‘And as I have not talked much with her, it must be because I am strong and have conquered the people among whom she was captive. How much the more then, will Zehowah love me, for the same reason.’

So he was light of heart, and soon afterwards he commanded everything to be made ready and mounted his bay mare for the night march.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Khaled was within half a day's march of Riad, the Sultan came out to meet him with a great train of attendants and courtiers, with cooks bringing food and sweetmeats, and a number of musicians. And they all encamped together for a short time in the shade of the trees, for there were gardens in the place. The Sultan embraced Khaled and put upon him a very magnificent garment, after which they sat down together in a large tent which the Sultan had brought with him. When they had eaten and refreshed themselves they began to talk, and

Khaled told his father-in-law all that he had done, and gave him an account of the spoils which he had brought back, commanding the most valuable objects to be brought into the tent. After this the Sultan desired to see the women captives.

‘There is one especially whom it may please you to take for yourself,’ said Khaled, and he ordered Almasta to be brought in.

When the male slaves had left the tent Almasta drew aside her veil. The Sultan looked at her and smiled, stroking his beard, for he was much pleased.

‘Her face is like a pearl and her hair is a setting of red gold,’ he said. ‘Truly she is like the sunrise on a fair morning when there are red clouds in the east.’

Almasta looked attentively at him, and afterwards she glanced at Khaled, who could not avoid looking at her on account of her beauty. Her face was grave and indifferent. Then Khaled told the Sultan how she had hated the Sultan of Shammar and had tried to kill him on the journey.

‘This is a dangerous woman, my son,’ said the old man. But he laughed as he said it, for although he was old, he was no coward. ‘She is dangerous, indeed. Will you love me, pearl of my soul’s treasures?’ he inquired of her, still smiling.

‘You are my lord and my master,’ she answered, looking down.

When Khaled heard this he wondered whether his father-in-law would get any affec-

tion from her. Zehowah had answered in the same words.

‘By Allah, I will give you such gifts as will make you love me,’ said the Sultan. ‘What shall I give you?’

‘His head,’ answered Almasta, raising her eyes quickly.

‘The head of the Sultan of Shammar?’

Almasta nodded, and Khaled could see that her lips trembled.

‘A dead man has no companions,’ said the Sultan, looking at Khaled to see what he would do. But Khaled cared little, and said nothing.

So the Sultan called a slave and ordered the captive’s head to be struck off immediately. Then Almasta threw herself upon the carpet on the floor of the tent and embraced his feet.

‘See how easily the love of a woman is got,’ Khaled thought, ‘even by an old man whose beard is grey and his limbs heavy.’

When Almasta rose again, she looked at Khaled triumphantly, as though to remind him of the night on the journey when he had hindered her from killing the captive in his cage. But though he understood her, he held his peace, for he had cared nothing whether the prisoner lived or died after he had delivered him over to his father-in-law, and he was considering whether he might not please Zehowah in some similar manner. This was not easy, however, for he was not aware that Zehowah had any private enemy, whose head he might offer her.

After the Sultan had seen the other women and the best of the spoils, Khaled begged that

he might be allowed to ride on into Riad alone, for he saw that the Sultan intended to spend the night in feasting where he had encamped. The Sultan was so much pleased with Almasta and so greatly diverted in examining the rich stuffs and the gold and silver vessels and jewels, that he let Khaled go, almost without trying to detain him, though he made him many speeches praising his conduct of the war, and would have loaded him with gifts. But Khaled would take nothing with him, saying that he would only receive his just share with the rest; and the fame of his generosity immediately went abroad among the soldiers and the Bedouins throughout all the camp.

‘For,’ said Khaled, ‘there is not a fleeter mare than mine among all those we have taken ;

my sword proves to be a good one, for I have tried it well ; as for women, I am satisfied with one wife ; and besides a wife, a sword and a horse, there are no treasures in the world which I covet.'

So Khaled rode away alone into Riad, for he desired no company, being busy with his own thoughts. He reached the gates at nightfall and went immediately to the palace and entered Zehowah's apartments. He found her sitting among her women in her accustomed place, listening to the tales of an old woman who sat in the midst of the circle. As soon as Zehowah saw her husband she sprang up gladly to meet him, as a friend would have done.

'Though it is summer-time, I have pursued the enemy,' said Khaled. 'And though the sun

was hot, I have got the victory and brought home the spoil.'

He said this remembering how she had tried to hinder him from going. Then he gave her his sword and he sat down with her, while the women brought food and drink, for he was weary, and hungry and thirsty. The women also brought their musical instruments and began to sing songs in praise of Khaled's deeds; but after a time he sent them all away and remained alone with Zehowah.

'O Zehowah,' he said, 'you are my law and my rule. You are my speech and my occupation. You are my Kebla to which I turn in prayer. For the love of you I have got the victory over many foes. And yet I see that your cheek is cold and the light of your eyes

is undisturbed. Have you no other enemies for me to destroy, or have you no secret foe whose head would be a pleasant gift?’

Zehowah laughed, as she fanned him with a palm leaf.

‘Do you still thirst for war, Khaled?’ she asked. ‘Truly you have swallowed up all our enemies as the dry sand swallows up water. Where shall I find enemies enough for you to slay? You went out in pride and you have returned in glory. Are you not yet satisfied? And as for any secret foe, if I have any I do not know him. Rest, therefore; eat and drink and spend your days in peace.’

‘I care little for either food or drink,’ Khaled answered, ‘and I need little rest.’

‘Will nothing but war please you? Must

you overcome Egypt and make Syria pay tribute as far as Damascus before you will rest?’

‘I will conquer the whole world for you, if you wish it,’ said Khaled.

‘What should I do with the world?’ asked Zehowah. ‘Have I not treasures and garments enough and to spare, besides the spoil you have now brought home? And besides, if you would conquer the world you must needs make war upon true believers, amongst whom we do not count the people of Shammar. Be satisfied therefore and rest in peace.’

‘How shall I be satisfied until I have kindled the light in Zehowah’s eyes at my coming, and until I feel that her hand is cold and trembles when I take it in mine?’

‘Do I say to my eyes, “be dull”—or to my hand, “do not tremble”?’ Zehowah asked. ‘Is this, which you ask of me, something I can command at will, as I can a smile or a word? If it is, teach me and I will learn. But if not, why do you expect of me what I cannot do? Can a camel gallop like a horse, or a horse trot like a camel, or bear great burdens through the desert? Have you come back from a great war only to talk of this something which you call love, which is yours and not mine, which you feel and I cannot feel, which you cannot explain nor describe, and which, after all, is but a whim of the fancy, as one man loves sour drink and another sweet?’

‘Do you think that love is nothing but a whim of the fancy?’ asked Khaled bitterly.

‘What else can it be? Would you love me if you were blind?’

‘Yes.’

‘And if you were deaf?’

‘Yes.’

‘And if you could not touch my face with your hands, nor kiss me with your lips?’

‘Yes.’

Zehowah laughed.

‘Then love is indeed a fancy. For if you could not see me, nor touch me, nor hear me, what would remain to you but an empty thought?’

‘Have I seen you, or touched you, or heard your voice for these two months and a half?’ asked Khaled. ‘Yet I have loved you as much during all that time.’

‘You mean that you have thought of me, as I have thought of you, by the memory of what was not fancy, but reality. Would you dispute with me, Khaled? You will find me subtle.’

‘There is more wit in my arm than in my head,’ Khaled answered, ‘and it is not easy for a man to persuade a woman.’

‘It is very easy, provided that the man have reason on his side. But where are the treasures you have brought back, the slaves and the rich spoils? I would gladly see some of them, for the messengers you sent told great tales of the riches of Hail.’

‘To-morrow they will be brought into the city. Your father has remained feasting in the gardens towards Dereyiyah, and the whole army with him. I rode hither alone.’

‘Why did you not remain too?’

‘Because that whim of the fancy which I call love brought me back,’ Khaled answered.

‘Then I am glad you love me,’ said Zehowah. ‘For I am glad you came quickly.’

‘Are you truly glad?’

‘I was very tired of my women,’ she answered. ‘I am sorry you have brought nothing with you. Are there any among the captives who are beautiful?’

‘There is one, a present sent lately to the Sultan of Shammar. She is very beautiful, and unlike all the rest. Your father is much pleased with her, and will perhaps marry her.’

‘Of what kind is her beauty?’ asked Zehowah.

‘She is as white as milk, her eyes are twin

sapphires, her mouth is a rose, her hair is like gold reddened in fire.'

Zehowah was silent for a while, and twisted a string of musk-beads round her fingers.

'The others are all Arabian women,' Khaled said at last.

'Why did you not keep the beautiful one for yourself?' asked Zehowah, suddenly throwing aside her beads and looking at him curiously. 'Surely you, who have borne the brunt of the war, might have chosen for yourself what pleased you best.'

Khaled looked at her in great astonishment.

'Have I not married Zehowah? Would you have me take another wife?'

'Why not? Is it not lawful for a man to take four wives at one time? And this woman

might have loved you, as you desire to be loved.'

'Would it be nothing to you, if I took her?'

'Nothing. I am the King's daughter. I shall always be first in the house. I say, she might love you. Then you would be satisfied.'

'Zehowah, Zehowah!' cried Khaled. 'Is love a piece of gold, that it matters not whence it be, so long as a man has it in his own possession? Or is it wood of the 'Ood tree that one may buy it and bring it home and make the whole house fragrant with it? Is a man's heart like his belly, which is alike satisfied with different kinds of food?'

'He who eats, knows by the taste whether he eats Persian mutton, or barley bread, or only

broiled locusts. But a man who believes that he is loved, knows that he is loved, so far as knowing is possible, and must be satisfied, if to be loved is what he desires.'

'That may be true. But he who desires bread is not satisfied with locusts. It is your love which I would have. Not the love of another.'

'You are like a man who hopes to get by argument a sum of money from one who has nothing,' said Zehowah, smiling at him. 'Can you make gold grow in the purse of a beggar? Or can you cause a ghada bush to bear dates by reasoning with it? Your heart is a palm tree, but mine is a ghada bush.'

'Yet an angel may touch the ghada and it will bear fruit,' answered Khaled, for he re-

membered how the angel had turned dry leaves into rich garments for him to wear.

‘Doubtless, Allah can do all things. But where is the angel? Hear me, Khaled, for I speak very reasonably, as a wife should speak to her husband, who is her lord and master. My lord is not satisfied with me and desires something of me which is not mine to give. Let him take another wife beside me. I have given my lord a kingdom and great riches and power. Let him take another wife now, who will give him this fancy of his thoughts for which he yearns, though she have no other possessions. In this way my lord will be satisfied.’

Khaled listened sadly to what Zehowah said, and he began to despair, for he was not subtle in argument nor eloquent in speech. The reason

of this was plain. In the days when he had been one of the genii he had wandered over the whole earth and had heard the eloquence of all nations and the arguments of all philosophers, learning therefrom that deeds are no part of words, and that they who would be believed must speak little and do much. But the genii possess no insight into the hearts of women.

Khaled reflected also that the length of life granted him was uncertain, and that he had already spent two months and a half at a distance from Zehowah in accomplishing the conquest whereby he had hoped to win her love. But since this had utterly failed, he cast about in his mind for some new deed to do, which could be done without leaving her even for a short time. But he was troubled by her in-

difference, and most of all by her proposing that he should take another wife. As he thought of this, he was filled with horror, and he understood that he loved Zehowah more than he had supposed, since he could not bear to think of setting another woman beside her.

Then his face became very dark and his eyes were like camp fires far off in the desert, and he took Zehowah's wrist in his hand, holding it tightly as though he would not let it go. As his heart grew hot in his breast, words came to his lips unawares like the speech of a man in a dream, and he heard his own voice as it were from a distance.

‘I will not take another,’ he said. ‘What is the love of any other woman to me? It is as dust in the throat of a man thirsting for water.

Show me a woman who loves me. Her face shall be but a cold mirror in which the image of a fire is reflected without warmth, her soft words shall be to me as the screaming of a parrot, her touch a thorn and her lips ashes. What is it to me if all the women of the world love me? Kindle a fire and burn them before me, for I care not. Let them perish all together, for I shall not know that they are gone. I love you and not another. Shall it profit a man to fill his mouth with dust, though it be the dust of gold mingled with precious stones, when he desires water? Or shall he be warmed in winter by the reflection of a fire in a mirror? By Allah! I want neither the wealth of Haïl, nor a wife with red hair. Let them take gold who do not ask for love. I want but one thing, and Zehowah alone can give

it to me. Wallah! My heart burns. But I would give it to be burned for ever in hell if I might get your love now. This I ask. This only I desire. For this I will suffer and for this I am ready to die before my time.'

Zehowah was silent, looking at him with wonder, and yet not altogether pleased. She saw that she could not understand him, though she did as well as she could.

'Has he not all that the heart of man can desire?' she thought. 'Am I not young and beautiful, and possessed of many jewels and treasures? Have I not given him wealth and power, and has he not with his own hand got the victory over his enemies and mine? And yet he is not satisfied. Surely, he is too hard to please.'

But he, reading her thoughts from her face, continued in his speech.

‘What is all the happiness of the world without love?’ he asked. ‘It is like a banquet in which many rich viands are served, but the guests cannot eat them because there is no salt in any of them. And what is a beautiful woman without love? She is like a garden in which there are all kinds of rare flowers, and much grass, and deep shade, but in which a man cannot live, because nothing grows there which he can eat when he is hungry.’

‘Truly,’ said Zehowah, ‘that is what you will make of your life. For there is a garden called Irem, planted in a secret place of the deserts about Aden, by Sheddad the son of Ad, who desired to outdo the gardens of paradise,

and was destroyed for his impiety with all his people, by the hand of Allah. But a certain man named Abdullah ibn Kelabah was searching in the desert for a lost camel, and came unawares upon this place. There were fruits and water there and all that a man could wish for, and Abdullah dwelt in peace and plenty, praising Allah. Then on a certain day he desired to eat an onion, and finding none anywhere, he went out, intending to obtain one, and having eaten it, to return immediately. But though he searched the desert many months he was never able to find the garden again. Wherefore it is said that Abdullah ibn Kelabah lost the earthly paradise of Irem for a mouthful of onion.'

'How can you understand me if you do not love me?' asked Khaled. 'Love has its own

language, and when two love they understand each the other's words. But when the one loves and the other loves not, they are strangers, though they be man and wife; or they are like Persians and Arabians not understanding either the other's speech, or that if the wife cries "father," her husband will bring her a cup of water supposing her to be thirsty. For those who would speak one language must be of one heart, and they who would be of one heart must love each other.'

Then Zehowah sighed and leaned against the cushions by the wall and drew her hand away from Khaled.

'What is it?' she asked in a low voice. 'What is it you would have?' But though she had already asked the question many times

she found no answer, and none that he was able to give could enlighten her darkness.

‘It is the spark that kindles the flame,’ Khaled said, and he pointed to the lights that hung in the room. ‘Your beauty is like that of a cunningly designed lamp, inlaid with gold and silver and covered with rich ornament, which is seen by day. But there is no light within, and it is cold, though it be full of oil and the wick be ready.’

Zehowah turned towards him somewhat impatiently.

‘And you are as one who would kindle the flame with words, having no torch,’ she answered.

‘Have I not done deeds also?’ asked Khaled. ‘Or have I spoken much, that you should reproach me? Surely I have slain more of your

enemies than I have spoken words to you to-night.'

'But have I asked for an offering of blood, or a marriage dower of dead bodies?'

Khaled was silent, for he was bitterly disappointed, and as his eyes fell upon the sword which hung on the wall, he felt that he could almost have taken it and made an end of Zehowah for very anger that she would not love him. Had he not gone out for her into the raging heat of summer, and borne the burden of a great war, and destroyed a nation and taken a city? Moreover, if neither words nor deeds could gain her love, what means remained to him to try?

All through the night Khaled pondered, calling up all that he had seen in the world in former times, until he fell asleep at last, wearied in heart.

Very early in the morning one of Zehowah's women came and stood by his bed and waked him. He could see that her face was pale in the dawn, her limbs trembled and her voice was uncertain.

'Arise, my lord!' she said. 'A messenger has come from the army with evil news, and stands waiting in the court.'

Khaled sprang up, and Zehowah awoke also.

'What is this message?' he asked hastily.

But the woman threw herself upon the floor and covered her face, as though begging forgiveness because she brought evil tidings.

'Speak!' said Zehowah. 'What is it?'

'Our lord the Sultan is dead!' cried the woman, and she broke out into weeping and crying and would say nothing more.

But when Zehowah heard that her father was dead, she sat down upon the floor and beat her breast and tore her hair, and wailed and wept, while all the women of the harem came and gathered round her and joined in her mourning, so that the whole palace was filled with the noise of their lamentations.

Khaled went out into the court and questioned the messenger, who told him that the Sultan had held a great feast in the evening in the gardens of Dereyiyah, having with him the woman Almasta and the other captive women, and being served by black slaves. But, suddenly, in the night, when most of the soldiers were already asleep, there had been a great cry, and the slaves and women had come running from the tent, crying that the Sultan was dead. This was

true, and the Jewish physician who had gone out with his master declared that he had died from an access of humours to the head, brought on by a surfeit of sweetmeats, there being at the time an evil conjunction of Zoharah and Al Marech in square aspect to the moon and in the house of death.

Khaled therefore mounted his bay mare and rode quickly out to Dereyiyah, where he found that the news was true, and the women were already preparing the Sultan's body for burial. Having ordered the mourning, and commanded the army to prepare for the return to the city, Khaled set out with the funeral procession ; and when he reached the walls of Riad he turned to the left and passed round to the north-east side of the city where the burial-ground is situated. Here he laid the body of his father-in-law in the

tomb which the latter had prepared for himself during his lifetime, and afterwards, dismissing the mourners, he went back into the city to the palace.

After the days of mourning were accomplished, the will of the Sultan was made known, though indeed the people were well acquainted with it already. By his will Khaled succeeded to the sovereignty of the kingdom of Nejed and to all the riches and treasures which the Sultan had accumulated during his lifetime. But the people received the announcement with acclamations and much joy, followed by a great feasting, for which innumerable camels were slain. Khaled also called all the chief officers and courtiers to a banquet and addressed them in a few words, according to his manner.

‘Men of Nejed,’ he said, ‘it has pleased Allah to remove to the companionship of the faithful our master the Sultan, my revered father-in-law, upon whom be peace, and to set me up among you as King in his stead, being the husband of his only daughter, which you all know. As for the past, you know me ; but if I have wronged any man let him declare it and I will make reparation. And if not, let none complain hereafter. But as for the future I will be a just ruler so long as I live, and will lead the men of Nejed to war, when there is war, and will divide the spoil fairly ; and in peace I will not oppress the people with taxes nor change the just and good laws of the kingdom. And now the feast is prepared. Sit down cheerfully, and may Allah give us both the appetite to enjoy

and the strength to digest all the good things which shall be set before us.'

But Khaled himself ate sparingly, for his heart was heavy, and when they had feasted and drunk treng juice and heard music, he retired to the harem, where he found Zehowah sitting with Almasta, the Georgian woman, there being no other women present in the room. He was surprised when he saw Almasta, though he knew that the captive women had been lodged in the palace, the distribution of the spoil from the war having been put off by the mourning for the Sultan.

When Almasta heard him enter, she looked up quickly and a bright colour rose in her face, as when the juice of a pomegranate is poured into milk, and disappeared again as the false

dawn before morning, leaving no trace. Khaled sat down.

‘Is not this the woman of whom you spoke?’ Zehowah asked. ‘I knew her from the rest by her red hair.’

‘This is the woman. Your father would have taken her for his wife. But Allah has disposed otherwise.’

‘She is beautiful. She is worthy to be a king’s wife,’ said Zehowah.

‘The Sultan?’ asked Almasta, for she hardly understood. Her face turned as white as bone bleached by the sun, and her fingers trembled, while her eyes were cast down.

Zehowah looked at Khaled and laughed.

‘See how she trembles and turns pale before you,’ she said. ‘And a little while ago her face

was red. You have found a torch wherewith to kindle this lamp, and a breath that can extinguish it.'

'I do not know,' Khaled answered. But he looked attentively at Almasta and remained silent for some time. 'It is now necessary to divide the spoils of the war,' he said at last, 'and to bestow such of these women as you do not wish to keep upon the most deserving of the officers.'

'My lord will surely take the fairest for himself, since she loves him,' said Zehowah, again laughing, but somewhat bitterly.

'May my tongue be cloven and my eyes be put out, may my hands wither at the wrists and my feet fall from my ankles, if I ever take any wife but you,' said Khaled. 'Yallah! So be it.'

When Zehowah heard him say this, even while Almasta's face was unveiled before him, she understood that he was greatly in earnest.

'Let me keep her for my handmaid,' she said at last.

'Is she mine that you need ask me? But it will be wiser to give her to Abdul Kerim, the sheikh of the horsemen. I have promised that the spoil should be fairly divided, and though few have seen this woman many have heard of her beauty. And besides, she would weary you, for she cannot talk in Arabian, nor does she seem quick to learn. Abdul Kerim has the first right, since Allah has removed your father, upon whom be peace.'

'Your words are my laws,' answered Zehowah obediently. 'And, indeed, it may be that

you are right, for I believe she can neither dance nor sing, nor play upon any musical instrument. She would certainly weary me after a time, as you say. Give her therefore to Abdul Kerim for his share.'

They then made Almasta understand that she was to be given to the sheikh of the horsemen ; but when she had understood she shook her head and smiled, though at first she said nothing, so that Khaled and Zehowah wondered whether she had comprehended what they had told her.

'Do you understand what we have told you ?' asked Zehowah, who was diverted by her ignorance of the Arabic language.

'I understand.'

'And are you not pleased that you are to be

the wife of Abdul Kerim, who is a rich man and still young?’

‘I was to be the Sultan’s wife,’ said Almasta, with difficulty, looking at Khaled. ‘You told me so.’

‘The Sultan is dead,’ Khaled answered.

‘Who is the Sultan now?’ she asked.

‘Khaled is the Sultan,’ said Zehowah.

‘You said that I should be the Sultan’s wife,’ Almasta repeated.

‘Doubtless, I said so,’ Khaled replied. ‘But Allah has ordered it otherwise.’

Almasta again smiled and shook her head.

CHAPTER VI

ON the following day Khaled made a division of the spoils, and gave Almasta to Abdul Kerim, enjoining upon him to marry her, since he had but two wives and could do so lawfully. The sheikh of the horsemen was glad, for he had heard much of Almasta's beauty, and he loved fair women, being of a fierce temper and not more than forty years old. So he called his friends to the marriage feast that same day, and Zehowah sent Almasta in a litter to his harem, giving her also numerous rich garments by way of a dower, but which in fact were due to Abdul

Kerim as his share of the booty. So the men feasted, with music, until the evening, when the bridegroom retired to the harem and the Kadi came and read the contract ; after which Abdul Kerim sat down while Almasta was brought before him in various dresses, one after the other, as is customary.

When the women were all gone away, Abdul Kerim began to talk to his wife, but she only laughed and said the few words she knew, not knowing what he said, and presently she began to sing to him in a low voice, in her own language. Her voice was very clear and quite different from that of the Arabian women whom Abdul had heard, and the tones vibrated with great passion and sweetness, so that he was enchanted and listened, as in a dream, while his

head rested against Almasta's knee. She continued to sing in such a manner that his soul was transported with delight; and at last, as the sound soothed him, he fell into a gentle sleep.

Almasta, still singing softly, loosened his vest, touching him so gently that he did not wake. She then drew out of one of the three tresses of her hair a fine steel needle, extremely long and sharp, having at one end a small wooden ball for a handle, and while she sang, she thrust it very quickly into his breast to its full length, so that it pierced his heart and he died instantly. But she continued to sing, lest any of the women should be listening from a distance. Presently she withdrew the needle so slowly that not a drop of blood followed it, and having made it

pass thrice through the carpet she restored it to her hair, after which she fastened the dead man's vest again, so that nothing was disarranged. She sang on, after this for some time, and then after a short silence she sprang up from the couch, uttering loud screams and lamentations and beating her breast violently.

The women of the harem came in quickly, and when they saw that their master was dead, they sat down with Almasta and wept with her, for as he lay dead there was no mark of any violence nor any sign whereby it could be told that he had not died naturally.

When Khaled heard that Abdul Kerim was dead, he was much grieved at heart, for the man had been brave and had been often at his right hand in battle. But the news being brought to

him at dawn when he awoke, he immediately sent the Jewish physician of the court to ascertain if possible the cause of the sudden death. The physician made careful examination of the body, and having purified himself returned to Khaled to give an account.

‘I have executed my lord’s orders with scrupulous exactness,’ he said, ‘and I find that without doubt the sheikh of the horsemen died suddenly by an access of humours to the heart, the sun being at that time in the Nadir, for he died about midnight, and being moreover in evil conjunction with the Dragon’s Tail in the Heart of the Lion, and not yet far from the square aspect of Al Marech which caused the death of his majesty the late Sultan, upon whom be peace.’

But Khaled was thoughtful, for he reflected that this was the second time that a man had died suddenly when he was about to be Al-masta's husband, and he remembered, how she had attempted to kill the Sultan of Haïl, and had ultimately brought about his death.

'Have you examined the dead man as minutely as you have observed the stars?' he inquired. 'Is there no mark of violence upon him, nor of poison, nor of strangling?'

'There is no mark. By Allah! I speak truth. My lord may see for himself, for the man is not yet buried.'

'Am I a jackal, that I should sniff at dead bodies?' asked Khaled. 'Go in peace.'

The physician withdrew, for he saw that Khaled was displeased, and he was himself as

much surprised as any one by the death of Abdul Kerim, a man lean and strong, not given to surfeiting and in the prime of health.

‘Min Allah!’ he said as he departed. ‘We are in the hand of the Lord, who knoweth our rising up and our lying down. It is possible that if I had seen this man at the moment of death, or a little before, I might have discovered the nature of his disease, for I could have talked with him and questioned him.’

But Khaled went in and talked with Zehowah. She was greatly astonished when she heard that Almasta’s husband was dead, but she was satisfied with the answer of the Jewish physician, who enjoyed great reputation and was believed to be at that time the wisest man in Arabia.

‘Give her back to me, to be one of my women,’ said she. ‘It is not written that she should marry a man of Nejed, unless you will take her yourself.’

But Khaled bent his brow angrily and his eyes glowed like the coals of a camp fire which is almost extinguished, when the night wind blows suddenly over the ashes.

‘I have spoken,’ he said.

‘And I have heard,’ she answered. ‘Let there be an end. But give me this woman to divert me with her broken speech.’

‘I fear she will do you an injury of which you may not live,’ said Khaled.

‘What injury can she do me?’ asked Zehowah in astonishment, not understanding him.

‘She asked of your father the head of the

Sultan of Hail, whom she hated. And your father gave it to her.'

'Peace be upon him!' exclaimed Zehowah piously.

'Upon him peace. And when he would have married her, he died suddenly at the feasting. And now this Abdul Kerim, who was to have been her husband, is dead also, without sign, in the night, as a man stung by a serpent in his sleep. These are strange doings.

'If you think she has done evil, let her be put to death,' said Zehowah. 'But the physician found no mark upon Abdul Kerim. By the hand of Allah he was taken.'

'Doubtless his fate was about his neck. But it is strange.'

Zehowah looked at Khaled in silence, but

presently she smiled and laid her hand upon his.

‘This woman loves you with her whole soul,’ she said. ‘You think that she has slain Abdul Kerim by secret arts, in the hope that she may marry you.’

‘And your father also.’

Then they were both silent, and Zehowah covered her face, since she could not prevent tears from falling when she thought of her father, whom she had loved.

‘If this be so,’ she said after a long time, ‘let the woman die immediately.’

‘It is necessary to be just,’ Khaled answered. ‘I will put no one to death without witnesses, not even a captive woman, who is certainly an unbeliever at heart. Has any one seen her do

these deeds, or does any one know by what means a man may be slain in his sleep, or at a feast, so that no mark is left upon his body? At Dereyiyah your father was alone with her in the inner part of the tent, and she was singing to him that he might sleep. For I have made inquiry. And when Abdul Kerim died he was also alone with her. I cannot understand these things. But you are a woman and subtle. It may be that you can see what is too dark for me.'

'It may be. Therefore give her back to me, and I will lay a trap for her, so that she will betray herself if she has really done evil. And when we have convicted her by her own words she shall die.'

'Are you not afraid, Zehowah?'

‘Can I change my destiny? If my hour is come, I shall die of a fever, or of a cold, whether she be with me or not. But if my years are not full, she cannot hurt me.’

‘This is undoubtedly true,’ answered Khaled, who could find nothing to say. ‘But I will first question the woman myself.’

So he sent slaves with a litter to bring Almasta from the house of mourning to the palace, and when she was come he sent out all the other women and remained alone with her and Zehowah, making her sit down before him so that he could see her face. Her cheeks were pale, for she had not slept, having been occupied in weeping and lamentation during the whole night, and her eyes moved restlessly as those of a person distracted with grief.

Khaled then drew his sword and laid it across his feet as he sat and looked fixedly at Almasta.

‘If you do not speak the truth,’ he said, ‘I will cut off your head with my own hand. Allah is witness.’

When Almasta saw the drawn sword, her face grew whiter than before, and for some moments she seemed not able to breathe. But suddenly she began to beat her breast, and broke out into loud wailings, rocking herself to and fro as she sat on the carpet.

‘My husband is dead!’ she cried. ‘He was young; he was beautiful! He is dead! Wah! Wah! my husband is dead! Kill me too!’

Khaled looked at Zehowah, but she said nothing, though she watched Almasta attentively. Then Khaled spoke to the woman again.

‘Make an end of lamenting for the present,’ he said. ‘It has pleased Allah to take your husband to the fellowship of the faithful. Peace be upon him. Tell us in what manner he died, and what words he spoke when he felt his end approaching, for he was my good friend and I wish to know all.’

Almasta either did not understand or made a pretence of not understanding, but when she heard Khaled’s words she ceased from wailing and sobbed silently, beating her breast from time to time.

‘How did he die?’ Khaled asked in a stern voice.

‘He was asleep. He died,’ replied Almasta in broken tones.

‘You will get no other answer,’ said Zehowah. ‘She cannot speak our tongue.’

‘Is there no woman among them all who can talk this woman’s language?’ asked Khaled with impatience, for he saw how useless it was to question her.

‘There is no one. I have inquired. Leave her with me, and if there is anything to be known, I will try to find it out.’

So Khaled went away and Zehowah endeavoured to soothe Almasta and make her talk in her broken words. But the woman made as though she would not be comforted, and went and sat apart upon the stone floor where there was no carpet, rocking to and fro, and wailing in a low voice. Zehowah understood that whatever the truth might be Almasta was determined to express her sorrow in the customary way, and that it would be better to leave her alone.

For seven days she sat thus apart, covering her head and mourning, and refusing to speak with any one, so that all the women supposed her to be indeed distracted with grief at the death of Abdul Kerim. And each day Khaled inquired of his wife whether she had yet learned anything, and received the same answer. But in the meantime he was occupied with his own thoughts, as well as with the affairs of the kingdom, though the latter were as nothing in his mind compared with the workings of his heart when he thought of Zehowah.

It chanced one evening that Khaled was riding among the gardens without the city, attended only by a few horsemen, for he was simple in all his ways and liked little to have a great throng of attendants about him. So he

rode alone, while the horsemen followed at a distance.

‘Was ever a man, or an angel, so placed in the world as I am placed?’ he thought. ‘How much better would it have been had I never seen Zehowah, and if I had never slain the Indian prince. For I should still have been with my fellows, the genii, from whom I am now cut off, and at least I should have lived until the day of the resurrection. But now my horse may stumble and fall, and my neck may be broken, and there is no hereafter. Or I may die in my sleep, or be killed in my sleep, and there will be no resurrection for me, nor any more life, anywhere in earth or heaven. For Zehowah will never love me. Was ever a man so placed? And I am ashamed to complain to her any

more, for she is a good wife, obedient and careful of my wants, and beautiful as the moon at the full, rising amidst palm trees, besides being very wise and subtle. How can I complain? Has she not given me herself, whom I desired, and a great kingdom which, indeed, I did not desire, but which no man can despise as a gift? Yet I am burned up within, and my heart is melting as a piece of frankincense laid upon coals in an empty chamber, when no man cares for its sweet savour. Surely, I am the most wretched of mankind. Oh, that the angel who made garments for me of a ghada bush, and a bay mare of a locust, would come down and lay his hand upon Zehowah's breast and make a living heart of the stone which Allah has set in its place!'

So he rode slowly on, reasoning as he had

often reasoned before, and reaching the same conclusion in all his argument, which availed him nothing. But suddenly, as the sun went down, a new thought entered his mind and gave him a little hope.

‘The sun is gone down,’ he said to himself. ‘But Allah has not destroyed the sun. It will rise in the east to-morrow when the white cock crows in the first heaven. Many things have being, which the sight of man cannot see. It may be that although I see no signs of love in the heaven of Zehowah’s eyes, yet love is already there and will before long rise as the sun and illuminate my darkness. For I am not subtle as the evil genii are, but I must see very clearly before I am able to distinguish.’

He rode back into the city, planning how he

might surprise Zehowah and obtain from her unawares some proof that she indeed loved him. To this end he entered the palace by a secret gate, covering his garments with his aba, and his head with the kefiyeh he wore, in order to disguise himself from the slaves and the soldiers whom he met on his way to the harem. He passed on towards Zehowah's apartment by an unlighted passage not generally used, and hid himself in a niche of the wall close to the open door, from which he could see all that happened, and hear what was said.

Zehowah was seated in her accustomed place and Almasta was beside her. Khaled could watch their faces by the light of the hanging lamps, as the two women talked together.

'You must put aside all mourning now,'

Zehowah was saying. 'For I will find another husband for you.'

'Another husband?' Almasta smiled and shook her head.

'Yes, there are other goodly men in Riad, though Abdul Kerim was of the goodliest, as all say who knew him. He was the Sultan's friend, but he was more soldier than courtier. He deserved a better death.'

'Abdul Kerim died in peace. He was asleep.' Almasta smiled still, but more sadly, and her eyes were cast down.

'He died in peace,' Zehowah repeated, watching her narrowly. 'But it is better to die in battle by the enemy's hand. Such a man, falling in the front of the fight for the true faith, enters immediately into paradise, to dwell for ever

under the perpetual shade of the tree Sedrat, and neither blackness nor shame shall cover his face. There the rivers flow with milk and with clarified honey, and he shall rest on a couch covered with thick silk embroidered with gold, and shall possess seventy beautiful virgins whose eyes are blacker than mine and their skin whiter than yours, having colour like rubies and pearls, and their voices like the song of nightingales in Ajjem, of which travellers tell. These are the rewards of the true believer as set forth in Al Koran by our prophet, upon whom peace. A man slain in battle for the faith enters directly into the possession of all this, but unbelievers shall be taken by the forelock and the heels and cast into hell, to drink boiling molten brass, as a thirsty camel drinks clear water.'

Almasta understood very little of what Zehowah said, but she smiled, nevertheless, catching the meaning of some of the words.

‘The Sultan Khaled loves black eyes,’ she said.
‘He will go to paradise.’

‘Doubtless, he will quench his thirst in the incorruptible milk of heavenly rivers,’ Zehowah replied. ‘He is the chief of the brave, the light of the faith and the burning torch of righteousness. Otherwise Allah would not have chosen him to rule. But I spoke of Abdul Kerim.’

‘He died in peace,’ said Almasta the second time, and again looking down.

‘I do not know how he died,’ Zehowah answered, looking steadily at the woman’s face.
‘It was a great misfortune for you. Do you

understand? I am very sorry for you. You would have been happy with Abdul Kerim.'

'I mourn for him,' Almasta said, not raising her eyes.

'It is natural and right. Doubtless you loved him as soon as you saw him.'

Almasta glanced quickly at Zehowah, as though suspecting a hidden meaning in the words, and for a moment each of the women looked into the other's eyes, but Zehowah saw nothing. For a wise man has truly said that one may see into the depths of black eyes as into a deep well, but that blue eyes are like the sea of Oman in winter, sparkling in the sun as a plain of blue sand, but underneath more unfathomable than the desert.

Almasta was too wise and deceitful to let the

silence last. So when she had looked at Zehowah and understood, she smiled somewhat sorrowfully and spoke.

‘I could have loved him,’ she said. ‘I desire no husband now.’

‘That is not true,’ Zehowah answered quickly. ‘You wish to marry Khaled, and that is the reason why you killed Abdul Kerim.’

Almasta started as a camel struck by a flight of locusts.

‘What is this lie?’ she cried out with indignation. ‘Who has told you this lie?’ But her face was as grey as a stone, and her lips trembled.

‘You probably killed him by magic arts learned in your own country,’ said Zehowah quietly. ‘Do not be afraid. We are alone, and no one can hear us. Tell me how you killed

him. Truly it was very skilful of you, since the physician, who is the wisest man in Arabia, could not tell how it was done.'

But Almasta began to beat her breast and to make oaths and asseverations in her own language, which Zehowah could not understand.

'If you will tell me how you did it, I will give you a rich gift,' Zehowah continued.

But so much the more Almasta cried out, stretching her hands upwards and speaking incomprehensible words. So Zehowah waited until she became quiet again.

'It may be that Khaled will marry you, if you will tell me your secret,' Zehowah said, after a time.

Then Almasta's cheek burned and she bent down her eyes.

‘Will you tell me how to kill a man and leave no trace?’ asked Zehowah, still pressing her. ‘Look at this pearl. Is it not beautiful? See how well it looks upon your hair. It is as the leaf of a white rose upon a river of red gold. And on your neck—you cannot see it yourself—it is like the full moon hanging upon a milky cloud. Khaled would give you many pearls like this, if he married you. Will you not tell me?’

‘Whom do you wish to kill?’ Almasta asked, very suddenly. But Zehowah was unmoved.

‘It may be that I have a private enemy,’ she said. ‘Perhaps there is one who disturbs me, against whom I plot in the night, but can find no way of ridding myself of him. A woman might give much to destroy such a one.’

‘Khaled will kill your enemies. He loves you. He will kill all whom you hate.’

‘You make progress. You speak our language better,’ said Zehowah, laughing a little. ‘You will soon be able to tell the Sultan that you love him, as well as I could myself.’

‘But you do not love him,’ Almasta answered boldly.

Zehowah bent her brows so that they met between her eyes as the grip of a bow. Then Khaled’s heart leaped in his breast, for he saw that she was angry with the woman, and he supposed it was because she secretly loved him. But he held his breath lest even his breathing should betray him.

‘The portion of fools is fire,’ said Zehowah, not deigning to give any other answer. For

she was a king's daughter and Almasta a bought slave, though Khaled had taken her in war.

‘Be merciful!’ exclaimed Almasta, in humble tones. ‘I am your handmaid, and I speak Arabic badly.’

‘You speak with exceeding clearness when it pleases you.’

‘Indeed I cannot talk in your language, for it is not long since I came into Arabia.’

‘We will have you taught, for we will give you a husband who will teach you with sticks. There is a certain hunchback, having one eye and marked with the smallpox, whose fists are as the feet of an old camel. He will be a good husband for you and will teach you the Arabic language, and your skin shall be dissolved but your mind will be enlightened thereby.’

‘Be merciful! I desire no husband.’

‘It is good that a woman should marry, even though the bridegroom be a hunchback. But if you will tell me your secret I will give you a better husband and forgive you.’

‘There is no secret! I have killed no one!’ cried Almasta. ‘Who has told you the lie?’

‘And moreover,’ continued Zehowah, not regarding her protestations, ‘there are other ways of learning secrets, besides by kindness; such, for instance, as sticks, and hot irons, and hunger and thirst in a prison where there are reptiles and poisonous spiders, besides many other things with which I have no doubt the slaves of the palace are acquainted. It is better that you should tell your secret and be happy.’

'There is no secret,' Almasta repeated, and she would say nothing else, for she did not trust Zehowah and feared a cruel death if she told the truth.

But Zehowah wearied of the contest at last, being by no means sure that the woman had really done any evil, and having no intention of using any violent means such as she had suggested. For she was as just as she was wise and would have no one suffer wrongly. Khaled, indeed, cared little for the pain of others, having seen much blood shed in war, and would have caused Almasta to be tortured if Zehowah had desired it. But she did not, preferring to wait and see whether she could not entrap the slave into a confession.

Khaled now came out of his hiding-place into

the room and advanced towards Zehowah, who remained sitting upon the carpet, while Almasta rose and made a respectful salutation. But neither of the women knew that he had been hidden in the niche. Zehowah did not seem surprised, but Almasta's face was white and her eyes were cast down, though indeed Khaled wished that it had been otherwise. He was encouraged, however, by what he had seen, for Zehowah had certainly been angry with Almasta on his account, and he dismissed the latter that he might be alone with his wife.

‘You are wise, Zehowah,’ he said, ‘and gifted with much insight, but you will learn nothing from this woman, though you talk with her a whole year. For she suspects you and is guarded in her speech and manner. I was standing by

the doorway a long time. You did not see me, but I heard all that you said.'

'Why did you hide yourself?' Zehowah asked, looking at him curiously.

'In order to listen,' he answered. 'And I heard something and saw something which pleased me. For when she said that you did not love me, you were angry.'

'Did that please you? You are more easily pleased than I had thought. Shall I bear such things from a slave? How is it her business whether I love or not?'

'But you were angry,' Khaled repeated, vainly hoping that she would say more, yet not wishing to press her too far, lest she should say again that she did not love him.

She, however, said nothing in reply, but busied

herself in taking his kefiyeh from his head and his sword from his side that he might be at ease. He rested against the cushions and drank of the cool drink she offered him.

‘This woman, Almasta, is exceedingly beautiful,’ he said at last. ‘It would indeed be a pity that a slave of such value should go into the possession of another so that we could see her no more. It is best that you should keep her with you.’

Zehowah laughed a little, as she sat down beside him and began to play with her beads.

‘This is what I have always said,’ she answered. ‘I will keep her with me.’

‘It is better so,’ said Khaled.

Then he remained silent in deep thought, having devised a new plan for gaining what he

most desired. It seemed to him possible that Zehowah might be moved by jealousy, if by nothing else; for although he had sworn to her, and angrily, that he would never take Almasta for his wife, and though nothing could really have prevailed upon him to make him do so, yet it would be easy for him to talk to the woman and speak to her of her beauty, and appear to take delight in her singing, which was more melodious than that of a Persian nightingale. Since she would be now permanently established in his harem, nothing would be easier than for him to spend many hours in the woman's society. Being a simple-minded man the plan seemed to him subtle, and he determined to put it into execution without delay. He knew also that Almasta had loved him since the first day when

she had been brought before him in the palace at Hail, and this would make it still more easy to rouse Zehowah's jealousy.

Though she had herself advised him to marry Almasta, he did not believe that she was greatly in earnest, and he felt assured that if the possibility were presented before her, in such a way as to appear imminent, she would be deceived by the appearance.

‘It is better that she should remain here,’ he said after a long time. ‘For we cannot put her to death without evidence of her guilt, and if we are obstinate in wishing to give her a husband, we do not know how many husbands she may destroy before she is satisfied. She is beautiful, and will be an ornament in your kahwah. Indeed I do not know why I sent her away just

now, when I came in. Let us call her back, that she may sing to us some of her own songs.'

Zehowah clapped her hands and Almasta immediately returned, for she had indeed been waiting outside the door, endeavouring to hear what was said, since she suspected that Khaled would speak of her and ask questions. She understood well enough, and often much better than she was willing to show, though she could as yet speak but few words of the Arabic language.

'Sit at my feet,' said Khaled, 'and sing to me the songs of your own people.'

Almasta took a musical instrument from the wall and sat down to sing. Her voice, indeed, was of enchanting sweetness, but as for the words of her songs, the seven wise men themselves

could not have understood a syllable of them, seeing that they were neither Arabic nor Persian, nor even Greek. Nevertheless, Khaled made a pretence of being much pleased, resting his head against the cushions and closing his eyes as though the sound soothed him. As for Zehowah, she watched the woman with great curiosity, wondering whether it were possible that a creature so fair as Almasta could have done the evil deeds of which she was suspected, and planning how she might surprise her into a confession of guilt.

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